

THE LONG LOVE





John Sedges



THE LONG LOVE



The John Day Company

New York

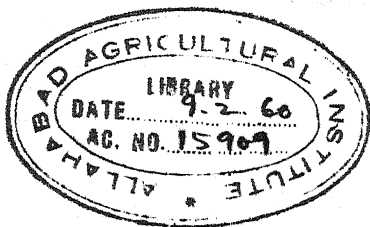


COPYRIGHT, MCMXLIX, BY THE JOHN DAY COMPANY

All rights reserved. This book, or parts thereof, must not be reproduced in any form without permission.

This book is published by the John Day Company, 62 West 45th Street, New York 19, N.Y., and on the same day in the Dominion of Canada by Longmans, Green, & Company, Toronto, Ontario.

Manufactured in the United States of America



THE LONG LOVE



1.2.1960 from Madras Service. Policy Dept. office.



I

EDWARD HASLATT was a young man both intelligent and cautious. When he had risen from his bed one fine morning he had not committed himself to a proposal of marriage. That it was possible he admitted. If the day were fair, if he found himself in a happy mood, if Margaret were kind, if they found exactly the spot he wanted for their picnic, then it might very well be that he would ask her to marry him.

He had determined that unless all these details were auspicious, he would wait. He had learned his lesson, he hoped. If she refused him again today it would be for the third time, and he would cease to think of her. That is, he hoped he could cease to think of her. While he dressed himself carefully, with an eye to the wave in his brown hair, and to the color of his tie, which was blue in contrast to his quiet brown eyes, he meditated on his tendency to faithfulness which amounted to stubbornness. Without this trait, he would certainly not have humiliated himself to ask a girl twice to marry him, to have suffered her refusals, and now to contemplate further humiliation.

Prudence and pride combined had often led him to wish that he could stop thinking about Margaret Seaton. His mother had frequently reminded him that she was not the only girl in the world and not even perhaps the prettiest, but such words did not penetrate his heart. There Margaret remained alone, and he had only to consult his heart to remember her in all the detail of her curly black hair, sea-blue eyes, fringed with long black lashes, and

her somewhat wide and too mobile mouth. Her profile was to him one of utter beauty. Her forehead was square and smooth, neither high nor low, and without the slight bulge he disliked so much in his own. Between her black brows her nose was low bridged and straight and delicate until the end where it tilted slightly, merely enough to make her upper lip short. He tried to persuade himself that her face had nothing to do with his loving her so painfully, but he knew that without this face, which in every detail was what he liked best in a woman, he would not have found her so inescapable. Without this face, certainly he would not have contemplated asking her for the third time to marry him.

For now, looking out of the window, he knew that there was no excuse to be found in the day. The mists were rolling softly from the round New England hills, and by midmorning even the valleys would be bright. The small clear river was still clouded, but by its own low fog. Once the sun fell upon it this too would be dispelled. The town of Chedbury was northwest of the city of Boston. It lay upon a sloping flank of Granite Mountain, its houses encircling a central green. At the highest point of this green stood the large and ancient church of white-painted wood. Its steeple was noble in design and its roof was high shouldered, as though winged. Chedbury was proud of its church, and its design, pure and spacious, had made it impossible for other denominations to compete among the townsfolk. So wholly did the church dominate that even the town hall, built a hundred years later, dared not stand beside it. Chedbury's town meeting of that date had built the hall behind the church, and had put the firehouse beside it. From down the hill neither could be seen, and on a Sunday, when most of Chedbury sat in the walnut pews of the church, the people felt comfortably that it had been wise of their ancestors to have the fire engines handy in case some secret blaze threatened their prize possession.

Around the green were some twenty houses, a small clean hotel, Mather and Haslatt's Printing Shop, a grocery store, and the post

office. Among the twenty houses the Seaton house was the largest, a square compact house, double winged, white shingled with green blinds. Upon the roof was a captain's walk, encircled by a white wooden balustrade, and the same solid balustrade enclosed the porches, both upstairs and down. Margaret, if she were at this moment looking out of the east window of her room, could see the same street upon which Edward gazed from his own window in the small but intensely neat house which was his home. The street looked washed and clean. He and Margaret had grown up on this street, all but neighbors, and he had fallen in love with her in high school. But he had been far from the most handsome or the most brilliant in their class, and she had snubbed him in favor of Harold Ames until their senior year, when, to his family's astonishment and his own, he had suddenly begun to grow tall. This drew Margaret's attention to him, and since Harold had been a year ahead and away at college, he had begun to go with Margaret. But he had not been rash enough to speak of love then, although he was already beginning to fear that he was doomed to love her. His own prudence protected him, and after their graduation he contented himself with asking her to write to him when they separated, he to go to Harvard and she to Vassar, and with seeing her, whenever she was willing, during subsequent summers and winters. This was not enough, for during two summers she was away, one on the Continent, and the other in England, where some of the ancestral Seatons still lived. Her father, Thomas Seaton, was a Tory of British water, in spite of the fact that the first Seaton had fought against the English regulars near Chedbury in 1775.

The Haslatts were English too, but not obtrusively so. Mark Haslatt, Edward's father, was not quite so well placed as Thomas Seaton. The Haslatt family had come to Chedbury a scant fifty years ago, whereas Seatons had always lived here, and as far as any one knew always in the same old red brick house, to which Thomas Seaton had added the two wings when his children were



born. The Haslatts had moved from one house to another, as their fortunes improved. Edward did not know the full history of his father, for his mother kept it wrapped in vagueness. He knew that at one time his father had even been a sheepherder on a Western ranch, and that his mother, the daughter of a homesick New England family, had brought him back to Chedbury. The first years had been desperate ones—that Edward knew, for he could remember them. He had still, in the sore recesses of his early childhood, the memory of ugly houses, poor furniture, a perpetual smell of laundry which grew acute on Monday mornings, when his father rose early to help his mother with the family wash. There was another period when his father was a conductor on the winding little trolley line between Chedbury and Deerbourn, and still another when he was trying to learn to be a contractor, apprenticed to his more successful brother, Henry Baynes. But this, too, had failed. Not until his father found himself in the printers' firm of Loomis and Mather did ease begin to come to the troubled family. There somehow Mark Haslatt fitted, and with security his confidence rose until at last he became a partner. When Loomis, the senior partner, died, the firm became Mather and Haslatt.

By the time Edward was ten years old and his younger brother Baynes was five they were comfortable in this twelve-room house. The white paint, the green blinds, the neat lawn under the elms, his own room in the third story, high enough to look out over the hills, became the setting of his boyhood. His sister Louise knew no other home. But because he could remember the other transient houses, their misery and their smell, he never quite forgot that this home was luxury.

Not that everything had been happy even here. Edward had a deep pride which forced him to frequent suffering. His common sense told him that such suffering was often self-inflicted and unnecessary, and this in turn made him ashamed to speak of it to anyone, and again in turn doubled his suffering. But so it was, and he could do nothing about it. He told himself that if Margaret

were ever to marry him and he could be in his own home, free from his mother and her moods and angers, and his father and his efforts to placate and soothe, he could be happy. But he was not sure. He was a creature compound of both parents, and he knew it. He feared sometimes in his darker hours that it was quite possible his moodiness would be too much even for his own marriage.

Nevertheless he refused to face this as knowledge. He steadfastly tried to convince himself that his ups and downs were the result of external circumstances and his need to get away from a home that he had outgrown. Whether his brother and sister felt as he did, he did not know. They were outwardly friendly with him, but they shared no confidences. His parents were determined to send both of the boys to college, and Edward had not the heart to tell his father that no college could possibly provide all that was expected of it. As the eldest, he had been graduated from Harvard this spring with sufficient honor, and Baynes, now at prep school, was to enter in due time. Louise was still in grade school. She was a thin tall girl with nothing remarkable in her face, unless it was her extreme blondness. It was still not decided whether she was to go to college.

Mark Haslatt, so eager for his sons, was dubious about the education of women, and Mrs. Haslatt, who had married at seventeen, had finished only the grade school in the little Kansas town where her father had been the general storekeeper. Edward, in his own pride, had tried recently to rouse ambition in Louise but she had only listened, her pale eyes wary.

"Don't you want to go to college, Louise?" Edward had inquired with sternness.

Louise saw that she was forced to answer. "I don't care if I do," she said in cautious assent. Then immediately she added with more courage, "And I don't care if I don't."

It was a family not unhappy, one tied together with deep and unspoken loyalties, but never quite cheerful. Fear of life, memory of hard times, dread of small slights in the community and the

casual forgetfulness of friends, all combined to keep the household temperature low.

For this reason the high and constant gaiety of the Seaton family seemed to Edward fascinating, if not altogether admirable. Self-assured, domineering, careless, old Thomas Seaton loved and quarreled with his handsome, white-haired wife. There was no caution in their tongues, and Edward enjoyed and yet was alarmed by the sharpness of their judgments, the edge of their wit. Without wit himself, he hoped that he might develop it were he in the clear brisk atmosphere that surrounded the Seaton. With them he was quite another man. Quiet and prudent, he was nevertheless courteous and agreeable, and he held his own well enough. He was not cowed by the Seaton, not even by old Thomas. Margaret's first admiring word had come as a consequence. "I must say, Ned, that you do hold up your end very well with Father. He's used to pertness from Sandra and me, and to tempers from Tom, but you're so—impervious. He's not used to that."

Edward had smiled, without betraying the fact that he had smarted under Thomas Seaton's thrust. "A printer, eh? Newspaper?"

"No, sir—books," Edward had answered sturdily.

"You can't get rich on that," Thomas said.

"Getting rich is not my ambition," Edward had replied.

"Ha!" Thomas had snorted. He was a big thick man, white haired and white bearded, and he wore tweed suits in a day when most gentlemen wore black broadcloth. But that was his English squire affectation, Chedbury thought. Edward had quivered under the portentous grunt, but it was true that he was not actually afraid of anyone. Doggedly he had overcome in himself the fears of his family.

"Edward!" Louise's voice now floated up the stairs. "Mama wants to know if you're ready for breakfast!"

"Coming!" he shouted. He turned from the window, gave

himself a final stare in the mirror and ran downstairs almost content with his appearance. He had no vanity about his angular face, believing himself far from handsome. But he took some pride in his height and in his good figure, square shouldered and lean. There were other men worse off than he, was the way he summed himself up.

Entering the solid comfortable dining room he felt his spirits rise. It was long before the day of antiques and the furniture was of heavy walnut, expensive but serviceable. One of the first things his mother had wanted when money began to accumulate in the bank was a good dining-room set. The long mirror on the buffet met his eyes as he entered and presented him with a double vision of the loaded breakfast table, his family seated about, and himself at the door. Only Baynes was not there and it was of Baynes that his mother spoke.

"Come in, Edward. I'm telling your father that I thought you cost him a pretty penny at college but Baynes is going to spare no expense, I see by the bills we're getting already. Your father has only just got up the courage to tell me."

"I thought you seemed tired last night, Mary," his father said mildly. His gray mustache was colored with egg yolk.

"So I was," she retorted, "and I'm tired again now. Do wipe the egg off yourself!" She looked at her husband while he wiped his mouth and then she turned to Edward. "Sit down, son. Do you want me to put up some lunch or will Margaret take the food?"

He sat down and resolutely, although self-consciously, did not bow his head in silent grace. His father's mumbled "blessing" over these meals had begun to seem provincial. Yet it took some strength to begin to eat, without even the gesture. He avoided his mother's eyes, lest catching his she be emboldened to reprove him again for his godlessness. This made him feel partially a coward but he was prudent. He poured heavy cream and much sugar on the bowl of oatmeal that was waiting at his place. "Don't bother, Mother," he said. "I'll buy something at the store."

"Nonsense," she said incisively. "Store food!"

"Then some of that chocolate cake," he suggested. He was not at all sure of Margaret's efforts but he would not have revealed this to his family.

His mother looked doubtful. "I'll make some sandwiches, too, out of that chicken we had last night," she said. "Then you'll be on the safe side."

"Safe side of what?" his father inquired dryly.

Edward smiled and his mother laughed. When she laughed they all forgave her. "Safe side of anything!" she said briskly. "Want more coffee, Mark?"

"No," his father said, "I've got to get down to the shop."

"Don't act like you were sorry to go," his mother rejoined. "You know that the day when you have to quit shop will be the sorriest day of your life."

"Oh, Mama," Louise cried in distress. "Why do you?"

Her mother had risen and was at the kitchen door, but she paused. "Why do I what, miss?" she asked.

"Nothing, nothing," her husband said peaceably. He folded his napkin, stared at the swinging door through which she passed, and then looked at his watch.

"Know what I'm going to do the day I retire?" he asked Louise.

"What, Papa?" she asked with mild interest.

"I'm going to catch the first train west and see where I used to live and maybe stay there," he said.

"Oh, Papa!" she wailed.

"You'll never retire," Edward said comfortably. He was eating buttered muffin with zest and appetite, and since the egg and bacon were exactly as he liked, he added them heartily to the foundation of oatmeal already consumed. He supposed he had stopped growing, but his hunger was huge.

At this moment the telephone rang in the hall, and startled them all. It was a new instrument in the house, and the bell rang harshly and always unexpectedly. Edward hastened out of the

room, picked up the heavy receiver and listened to, under his whirrs and rumbles. Out of these came at last Margaret id not a fresh and impatient. "Is that you, Ned?" she demanded. which

"Yes, it is!" he shouted. he

"Don't bellow, Ned! It takes off my ear," she called back.

"Ned, can you hear me?"

"Yes, I can," he replied in a lower tone.

"You sound so odd," she complained, "as though you were shy."

"I'm not," he said briefly.

"Ned!" she called again.

"Yes?"

"Ned, will you be very disappointed if we put off the picnic?"

His heart fell into the pit of his stomach. Then he grew so angry that he was speechless.

"Ned, did you hear?" she cried.

"Yes, I do hear!" he cried back. "And I shall be very disappointed, Margaret."

There was silence for an instant. Then her voice came back as vigorous as ever.

"It's only that Father has suddenly decided to go to New York and wants me to go with him."

"I've been counting on this day ever since you came home, which is three weeks and more," he replied.

"Oh, Ned!" she cried with new impatience. "You're always here and so am I—as if there weren't millions of days!"

"We may not get such another fine day," he said. Then he went on grimly. "If you don't want to come, then I don't want you to come, but let's not plan another day, Margaret. Let's just say there won't be a picnic—ever again!"

His mother came to the door of the hall, a spoon in her hand, and he saw her make fierce faces at him.

"Edward Haslatt!" she hissed. "If you take this—"

He waved her away, trying to hear Margaret.

"Oh, dear, I knew you'd feel that way," she complained.

"Of course I do," he said stubbornly.

"Ned, if I come, will you promise to behave?"

"Depends on what you mean by that," he said.

He wished his mother would go away, so that he could speak freely. But the telephone was never considered private. His father stood waiting at the front door, and Louise was now in the hall.

"You know what I mean," Margaret insisted.

"I do not," he retorted.

"Edward, you're so—indomitable!" she complained.

"Maybe I am," he agreed.

There was a silence so long that he wondered if she had hung up. Then she said in a resigned voice, "Very well. Do you like ham or beef sandwiches?"

"Mother is putting up some chicken," he said. "Don't you bother."

"Oh, good," Margaret said, without gratitude in her voice.

"Then I'll only bring apple pie, shall I?"

"That'll be all right," he said shortly. "I'll come by for you in half an hour."

He hung up the receiver and faced his family. "It's all right," he said shortly.

"Shall I make the sandwiches?" his mother asked.

"Yes, please, Mother," Edward said.

His father kissed his mother and went his way and Louise began to clear the table and his mother returned to the kitchen. He himself went upstairs and to his own room. He felt shaken, and he did not want his mother to see it. The mild hopefulness with which he had begun the morning was now entirely gone. He committed himself to pessimism. Margaret did not love him and would never love him. He wished that he had had the sense to abandon the picnic. Then his deep unalterable stubbornness rose in him. No, he would go, he would do everything exactly as he had planned. He would ask her to marry him and when she refused he would tell her that he would never ask her again.

When he came downstairs with his hard straw hat under his arm, his angular young face was so stern that his mother said not a word when she handed him the neatly wrapped box into which she had packed his lunch. He took it and had already reached the door, when he heard her speak.

He paused.

"What'd you say, Mother?"

Her gray eyes were profoundly tender. "I said, God bless you, my son," she repeated.

He blushed with surprise. "Thank you, Mother," he muttered and was gone.

He had hired a horse and buggy, and from the high seat of the vehicle he saw Margaret waiting for him on the porch of the Seaton house. Any other girl in Chedbury would have waited for him inside the house, and any other girl would have worn hat and coat and possibly gloves. But Margaret sat on the top step, leaning her bare dark head dreamily against the white painted post. She had a paper parcel beside her, undoubtedly the pie, and she wore her old gray tweed suit, the skirt of which he privately considered too short. It was at least six inches above her ankles. She knew how he felt about it, for her too discerning eye had caught his disapproval one rainy day when they had met accidentally on the street.

"What's the matter?" she had demanded. "Do I have a smudge on my face?"

When she had wormed out of him why he had averted his eyes, she had laughed at him. "I tore the edge of my skirt on a barbed wire fence," she said frankly, "and so I had to shorten it all around. Don't be silly, Ned." He had retired into silence and they had parted.

Now as he drew near he felt that had she really cared about him, she would have put on something else. "For two cents I wouldn't ask her to marry me," he thought gloomily, but he knew he would.

She looked up alertly when he reached the gate.

"Slowpoke!" she called. "I've been waiting ages." She jumped up with the lightness that was so pleasant to see, and walked quickly down the path. He knew that at the windows along the streets curtains were drawn back to see them go off, but she would not care.

"It took me considerable time to figure out whether you were coming or not," he said. He made preparations to get out of the buggy, but she swung herself up beside him.

"I see you've got the new horse," she said, paying no heed to his last remark.

"I told Jim I didn't want the balky one," he rejoined. Everyone in Chedbury knew Jim Smiley's horses intimately.

They rode in silence for some time. He was still too ruffled to make talk, and his heart was very low. In spite of the old suit Margaret was looking beautiful. She had put on a blue linen blouse, and he was startled to see that it was collarless. It was almost as strange as if she were décolleté. She caught him looking at her neck.

"If there is anything I hate it is having to wear a high collar on a picnic," she instantly declared. "It's an old blouse and I cut the collar off."

"Looks nice," he said with reserve.

"I don't really care how it looks," she said.

They were silent again for a while. Then being young, she but twenty-one and he twenty-two, the magic of the day stole into their blood. Though they lived to be a hundred, there could not be enough of such days. The mists were gone, and the sun shone down on the changeful autumn colors of the trees. The street of Chedbury, lined with old elms, its white houses set back in green lawns, became soon a country road between low stone walls, and then a wide upward trail into a brilliantly shadowed wood, beside a clear brook.

Edward's mind busied itself with the question of when he should make his proposal of marriage. If he kept it unspoken upon

his mind, he could not enjoy his food. On the other hand, he would have no appetite whatever once all hope was gone. He was disgusted with himself to discover that he was so foolish as still to harbor hope in his heart. When she had shown him so plainly this morning!

The trail reached a sudden parting in the trees, and they looked down the beautiful hillside upon which Chedbury lay, now the very picture of a village, the houses glinting white in the sun and the spire of the church lifting itself slender and tall above the surrounding trees. This, he decided suddenly, would be the place, let come what may. He drew up the horse and jumped down.

"Let's stop here, Margaret," he said.

She laughed. "Don't be so grim—unless you are going to murder me, Ned. Heavens!"

But she leaped down in one of her long graceful motions and stood only a little less tall than he, waiting. Her bright blue eyes were knowing and confident, and while he felt all his love rush out toward her it occurred to him that some small amount of shyness in her might have been more natural. There was nothing about her that was like other women, and this was why he loved her so desperately and yet with foreboding. Life with Margaret could not be peaceful, whatever else it was. He did not deceive himself. Had there been any way to save himself, he might have done so, but there was no way. If she would not have him, he supposed in common sense that some day he would marry someone else, but he could not imagine it.

"Sit down on that log, Margaret," he commanded her.

She sat down obediently, and he stood and looked down at her and saw what he expected—that her eyes were full of laughter.

"Put the whip down, Ned," she said gaily. "Suppose old Miss Townsend is using her telescope!"

He turned abruptly without answering, tied the horse, and threw the whip into the buggy. Then he sat down on the log. Sitting thus, they were below the level of the treetops on the hill and



therefore invisible. At this hour of a weekday it was not likely that anyone would be on the mountain.

"Margaret," he began firmly, "let's have it out once and for all."

Her hands flew to her face. "Oh, dear!" she said from behind them. "Before lunch?"

"Here and now," he said in the same stubborn voice. "It'll be for the last time, I promise."

"No, Ned, don't promise!" This little voice, coming from behind her hands, threw him off entirely.

"Eh?" he exclaimed. "Why, Margaret!" Mad hope surged up in him. "You don't mean—"

She shook her head, her hands still against her eyes. "I don't mean anything! You're always thinking I mean things!"

He reached over and with both his hands pulled hers away from her face and held them hard. She tried to free herself and could not.

"Say what you do mean," he commanded.

She stopped struggling and looked suddenly sensible and mild. The sun fell full on her vivid face, and it was all he could do to keep from taking her into his arms. "You didn't even bring a hat, and your nose is already freckling," he accused her.

"That wasn't what I thought you were going to say," she said softly.

"It isn't," he retorted, still holding her hands, "but you keep taking my mind off . . . Margaret!"

"Yes?"

"Shall I go on?"

"If you must . . ."

He considered her, the red mouth, the creamy neck, and the little black curls of her hair. "I'll never give up," he muttered.

She lowered her lashes at this and was silent, and he felt the triumph of her yielding.

"Margaret," he spoke her name in a deep and solemn voice, "for the third time, I ask you—will you be my wife?"

Each time he had asked her she had responded differently. The first time she had laughed, had shaken her head, and had run away. He had been fool enough to blurt out his love for her at the senior dance, and almost immediately her next partner had claimed her, a Groton fellow whom he loathed, and not only because he had lost the editorship of the *Harvard Crimson* to him. The second time was well considered. He had walked home with her from church, and artfully taking her the long way around, he had imagined that she would need his help on an icy road. But she had been very independent indeed. When he had again asked her to marry him she had said positively, "No."

"Why not?" he had demanded, instantly hurt.

"I don't feel like it," she had replied.

To that she had not been willing to add one word, and they had walked the rest of the way in silence.

Now he waited trembling. She tugged her hands away suddenly from his, and he was terrified. But he let them go quickly and sat in silence. When she spoke, it was with unexpected thoughtful calm.

"Ned, of course I have been thinking a great deal. I knew you'd ask me again. Goodness, how I know you—much better than you do me! That's the trouble. If I didn't know you so thoroughly I'd probably marry you right off. But—"

She paused, shook her head, and looked sad. He felt his heart fall again, like a stone thrown in a well. "What's the matter with me?" he asked. He was so wounded that he could not summon his pride.

He expected laughter, but he was further confounded when she lifted serious eyes to his. "You're good," she replied with entire honesty. "It's me."

His heart bounced up again. He leaned toward her ardently. "If it's only that, Margaret, darling, darling, leave it to me. I'll take you as you are."

But she moved away from him, out of reach of his hands.

"There isn't anything the matter with me, Ned. It's just—I want a very special kind of marriage."

He looked so blank that she gave him a slight push. "There—you see you don't even know what I mean!"

"Why don't you tell me?" he demanded.

She considered this and began again. "I don't want to be married the way other people are. I want it to be splendid—fun, you know, and strong enough for us to fly at each other when we feel like it, and say what we really think, and yet know that nothing can separate us, not even moments of hate. I'm not a careful person, Ned. I don't want to have to stop and think whether something is going to hurt your feelings. I'll get tired of that. Everything's got to be straight and strong and clear."

"I can take that," he said.

"I'm not sure you can," she retorted. Her firm hand busied itself with a bit of crumbling wood on the log. Every time they met he had looked at that hand to see if it wore a ring. The nightmare of his life was that she would engage herself to someone else before he had a chance to make her see she must marry him.

"How can I make you sure?" he asked.

"I don't know," she replied.

He had not imagined such an impasse as this—Margaret willing to marry him if she could be sure he was strong enough! He knew what she meant. With her extraordinary intelligence she had penetrated his weakness, the ease with which he could be wounded—his feelings hurt, as his mother put it.

"You're pretty smart," he said slowly. "Any man takes his life in his hands when he marries a smart woman."

"That's true," she agreed.

"But it's you or none, Margaret. I'm that sort," he said slowly.

"If I marry you," she said gravely, "it will be my life and my career. Will it be yours?"

He looked into the clear and honest depths of her sea-blue eyes, and then he saw dimly a vision of what marriage could mean to a man—a companionship complete, a friendship profound, some-

thing as far above the dull mating of the commonplace as man was above the beast. "Yes," he said. "That I can promise—and I do."

"Then will you marry me?" she asked.

The wonder of these words lay in their simplicity. She spoke them quietly, not moving to touch him, not putting out her hand.

"Are you—asking *me*?" he gasped.

"Yes!"

"Oh, Margaret!"

He rose and drew her up to him. "Sure you mean it?"

"If you'll keep your promise."

With his right hand he pressed her head against his breast. "If you know me so well, don't you know I keep my promises?"

She lifted her head and looked at him. "Yes," she said again. It was assent and faith, and he trembled with fear and joy. . . .

Across this sublimity she broke a moment later with a murmur. He bent to hear it.

"I'm hungry," she was saying into his coat, "aren't you?"

He laughed and let her go. "Starved! But we can't eat here on the road."

"Why not? It isn't as private as making marriage proposals."

"No, but it's not my idea." He felt rising amazement. "Matter of fact, none of it's been what I planned this morning."

"You *planned*?"

"Of course. You don't think I would leave the biggest thing in my life to chance, do you?"

"Oh, Ned, do you plan everything?" she cried.

"Of course," he said stoutly.

She flew into a fit of incomprehensible laughter at this and ran to the buggy and he untied the horse and leaped in beside her, and they began to wind slowly up the trail. He put an arm about her and felt the astonishing ineffable joy of her leaning upon him. She said, "I'll always be spoiling your plans, because I only do things when I think of them."



"I'll learn that—and everything," he declared.

"But when you get to the picnic spot—"

"It's not a real spot," he felt it only honest to say.

"Yes, it is, if you dreamed of it!" she insisted.

They found it over the brow of the mountain, beside another stream, that eddied in a small pool. Both of them cried out at the same moment that it was found, he pointing with the whip, she with her forefinger. He unharnessed the horse and tethered it at a little distance and she unpacked the lunch. His mother had put in a small clean tablecloth and inspired by this, Margaret picked red oak leaves and laid them together for plates. Upon them she placed the neat sandwiches, the cake, and the pie. He was about to sit down beside her but she shook her head. "Sit across from me, Ned. I want to see how you'll look every day at breakfast."

He obeyed, and was mortified to feel that he looked foolishly shy. "I'm not much to stare at," he said, trying to be casual.

"I've hated every handsome man I ever saw," she remarked. "Sandwich, Ned!"

He took one and bit into it. "You didn't hate Harold Ames," he reminded her.

"Don't be silly—I did!" she retorted.

"Did he ask you to marry him?"

She bit deeply into her sandwich. "What if he did?" she asked.

"Nothing—only I don't like it." He was ashamed to tell her that jealousy was one of his vices. Instinctively he knew that she would not tolerate jealousy. Then he felt it a necessity to be honest with her. "I'll have to tell you I'm a jealous disposition—at least I think I am."

"I know you are," she said.

He looked at her. "Do you!" he rejoined somewhat feebly. Then his rare humor glinted. "Are you always going to tell me you already know everything I tell you? It'll make for a dull marriage."

"I won't always tell you," she said, dimpling. The two dimples

in her cheeks were what he had seen first about her as a little girl at Chedbury birthday parties.

"Know what Lucy Snell used to say about you?" he asked with wicked intent.

"What?"

"She said you laughed on purpose to show your dimples."

She laughed. "Maybe I do."

"Doesn't anything ever make you angry, Margaret?"

"Not if I feel happy, and I nearly always do."

He sighed. "I wish I could say that! I have the devil of a temper."

"I don't mind the temper if you'll bear my not being afraid of it. I shan't take anything from you, Ned."

"I don't want you to." He put down his second sandwich and looked at her earnestly. "Margaret, I want to say something now while I'm calm and happier than I've ever been in my life. And I want you to remember it when I'm in one of my sulks, and pay no mind to me."

"Yes, Ned?" She put down her sandwich that she might listen properly.

"I don't want you to be afraid of me, ever—or ever to yield to me. Stand up to me, Margaret—and help me!"

"I will," she said softly.

"At whatever cost?" he asked sternly.

"Yes!" Again her beautiful full *yes!*

"Even if I should strike you?"

Her eyes flashed. "If you hit me I'll hit you!" she said warmly.

They both laughed. "Free for all, eh?" he said fondly.

By common accord they leaned across the little tablecloth and kissed.

Thus passed the glorious day. He would not have dreamed of prolonging it beyond the prudence of Chedbury's watchful eyes. His tenderness for her was bottomless—he would protect her even from himself. So, timing the drive home by the stand of the sun in

the sky, soon after four he rose from the spot where he had been lying at her feet while she sat on a low old stump.

"We must be going, Margaret, if we're to get home before sunset."

"Why should we get home before sunset?" she inquired dreamily.

He did not answer at once, busying himself with harnessing the reluctant horse. She knew as well as he did why they should get home and she was teasing him. For a moment he toyed with the idea of accepting the provocation. He might say, "Very well, we won't get home." But he was afraid. There was no telling how far her mischief might carry her. Once when they were children someone had dared her to jump from the barn roof on the Seaton place, and he had stood by, not believing that she would be so foolish. But she had been so foolish and he could never forget the horrible moment when she had jumped into the air and he saw her dark curls flying behind her head and her arms outspread like wings.

"Remember the day you jumped off the barn roof?" he asked now.

"What makes you think of that?" she asked.

"I wonder!" He waited until the horse was ready. "Come, Margaret," he said firmly.

She wavered and then suddenly obeyed. The sight of her thus docile drew the love out of him like lodestone and he took her into his arms and kissed her more ardently than he had yet allowed himself.

"Oh, Ned," she whispered, "we are going to be happy?"

"Of course we are," he agreed.

So they came down the mountain through the late and golden sunshine, and the trail became the country road and the road became again the street of Chedbury, and by the time he reached the gate of her house they were sitting decorously side by side and not too close. He leaped down, opened the gate, and their hands clung for a moment.

"Good night," she said softly and her eyes glowed dark as sapphires.

"Good night, dear love," he said. "I'd call you tonight, but the family is always about. Tomorrow I'll be over to see your father."

"Let me tell him first!"

He paused at this. "No, Margaret—leave it to me to speak for myself."

"But why?"

"I'd feel better to have it so."

"Then I've got to keep it all night? I'll tell Mother at least."

"No, Margaret," he insisted. "Tonight let's just have it all to ourselves."

She opened her mouth to protest, then did not.

"All right, Ned," she said softly, and gave him her quick and brilliant smile.

Upon this he left her and drove the horse and buggy to the livery stable and went home on foot through the golden street.

Now that he was alone he felt solemn, exalted and set apart. He had given his promise to Margaret that their marriage would be his life and his career. What this meant he did not fully know, but he knew that Margaret was his center, and all he did must be built about her. He was capable of devotion as few men were, perhaps, and it did not degrade him to know it. He found a deep fulfillment in self-devotion. But he knew that only Margaret could have called this fulfillment into being. Had he married someone else, he would at this moment have been thinking of himself. Now he was thinking of Margaret.

He lifted his head and breathed in the cool autumn air, sharp and pure. He lifted his eyes to the mountain where so much had taken place. The day was divided as cleanly as if a sword had cut across time. This morning he had been one man and now he was another. His marriage was to be like none he had ever seen.

He opened the heavy walnut door of his father's house and stepped into the hall and listened. The house was silent. Then he

heard a murmur of voices from the kitchen, his father's and his mother's. He wanted to tell no one of what had come about this day. Tomorrow when he went to see Mr. Seaton he would have to tell, and then his own family must know. But tonight must be the drawn-out dream which the day had been. He tiptoed upstairs, entered his own room, and stood with his back to the closed door.

The room was impressed upon his memory by childhood and youth, and yet now it looked new to him. No, it looked as old as a shell outgrown, a skin cast aside. His home was here no more.

He moved about silently, washed himself and changed his clothes, and went downstairs. The door of the dining room was open and he saw Louise setting the table.

He paused at the door. "Supper about ready?"

She looked at him vaguely. "I suppose so."

"I'll fetch the milk jug," he said. He went into the kitchen and was immediately aware that he had interrupted talk between his parents. His father looked at him self-consciously, and his mother, continuing to stir the gravy she was making in a saucepan, did not look at him.

"I've come to fetch the milk jug," he said.

"It's there," his mother said.

His father got to his feet from the chair behind the stove. "Have a good day?" he asked, trying to be casual.

"Yes, very good," Edward said, trying to be as casual. He opened the icebox and took out a bottle of milk and poured it and carried the jug into the dining room. Louise had finished the table and was at the window staring into the twilight of the street. He wondered what her thoughts were and could not have asked, knowing full well how he at her age would have refused such a question.

At the same moment his mother pushed open the door and came in, carrying a platter of sliced boiled beef, covered with the gravy. "Come along, now," she said briskly. "Let's eat while the food is hot."

His father came in while she hurried back for potatoes and cabbage, and they sat down. The evening, Edward thought, could be exactly like every other. Only he knew that it was not.

"Edward!"

His mother's ghostly voice woke him that night out of a sound sleep. He saw her standing in the middle of his bedroom, wrapped in her gray flannel dressing gown. Her hair was in curlers and her face was pale in the moonlight that fell through the wide open window.

He sat up in bed, half dazed. "What's wrong, Mother?"

She came near and sat on the bed, then rose and shut the window and sat down in the barrel-backed chair, shivering.

"That's what I don't know," she said in a low tense voice. "I can't sleep for thinking of things."

"What things, Mother?" Instinctively he knew.

"Edward, I know something happened between you and Margaret today."

"What makes you think so, Mother?"

"You were different all evening."

"Was I?" He was flabbergasted at this, having flattered himself that he had been entirely natural.

"Even Louise noticed it," his mother said.

His stubbornness rose up in him and he did not reply. What claim had anybody on his confidence until he chose to give it? He was no longer a child. That he had spoken his love and that Margaret had accepted it made them both free of the past.

"I don't want to seem to inquire into your affairs," his mother said after a decent interval, "but it would hurt me if you got married without telling me, Edward."

"I am not married," he said reluctantly.

"Are you engaged?" She put the question so swiftly that it was like the pounce of a bird. He did not know how to parry it, being too honest. "Well, yes, I am," he said slowly. Then his anger got

the better of him. "I was going to tell you tomorrow, Mother. It did seem to me more decent to speak to Mr. Seaton first, after I'd found out Margaret's mind."

"But I'm your mother," she said.

He recognized the pained sadness in her voice. How often in his childhood had it compelled him to acts which he had hated! In his adolescence it had still compelled him, although he had occasionally protested and with anger. That phase had passed, too, and he had learned to remain silent when he caught the overtones in his mother's voice. Now, sitting up in his bed, he was enraged to feel her forcing him back into his adolescence. All his new manhood resisted her. He set his lips firmly and gazed at a print on the wall above her head. It was one he had chosen himself when he was fifteen, a white ship sailing at full speed over a bright blue sea, under a sky as blue. He knew now that as a print it was not the best, but on so many mornings had he waked to that fresh blue sea and flying ship that he would have missed it, had it been gone. He thought, "I'll want to take that with me."

"You're not going to say a word?" his mother inquired.

"Not till tomorrow, Mother."

"Then I call it heartless of you," she declared. Her square face turned a coppery red and she pulled at her corded belt and tied it more tightly. "And I shall go on and say what I was going to say. We've nothing to be ashamed of. Your father's business is as good as any in Chedbury or around. What I'm saying is for your own good."

"Don't say it, Mother," he broke in.

"I will say it!" Her voice rose. "I'm not to be stopped by my own son, I hope. I warn you, Edward, you'll never be happy with those Seatons. She's a stuck-up proud girl, and she hasn't a proper decency."

He kept his eyes on the flying ship and the blue that was the color of Margaret's eyes.

"A poor housekeeper, too! And, Edward, they don't think a

thing of divorce. You know even Thomas Seaton's own sister has been divorced. That's why she has to live in Paris. Decent people won't have her here. And where does old Seaton get his money? He's never worked enough to have it. Somewhere in New York, speculating! Who knows? And they have no religion—he's a free-thinker, and she'll have freethinking ways and bring up your children different from all of us, and I'll have no comfort in them."

He glanced nervously at her hands. They were trembling and he knew what would happen. The next moment she began to cry soundlessly, and then she hurried out of the room, leaving the door wide open. He sighed, got up, closed the door and opened the window and turned off the lamp. He'd have to tell Margaret that after all his mother had wormed it out of him. Only by thinking of Margaret, only by going over the whole day, minute by minute, was he able to reinforce his determination and renew his love and so begin again his own life. Then he fell asleep, comforted. His mother did not matter any more.

Under his everyday exterior the next morning Edward concealed from his mother any memory of their conversation in the night. With determination he kept himself from calling Margaret on the telephone, even from his father's office. For his father, after muttering his usual blessing and then in abstraction eating half his breakfast, had suddenly said, "If you have nothing better to do, Edward, I could take a little help in the office this morning."

Edward nodded and nothing more was said between them. His mother was silent, too, beyond the necessary questions about the food, and Louise ate in her usual silence. But Edward knew, as well as though words had told him, that his mother had repeated to his father the midnight scene, and that this morning at the office his father would manage to be alone with him and to say something. He could not imagine what it would be.

But none of it mattered, he told himself. Yesterday was true,



and this afternoon he would see Margaret. He did not look forward with pleasure to his interview with Thomas Seaton, but he was not afraid of it. He would be dignified and self-assured, knowing that he had Margaret's promise, and even if the older man objected, the marriage would go on just the same.

The meal was finished, and Edward and his father rose simultaneously. "I'll meet you at the door, Father," he said.

He kissed his mother, as he knew she liked him to do, nodded to Louise, and left the room. Out in the hall he toyed again with the temptation of calling Margaret, and decided against it. He suspected that she slept late and it would be harder to call and not hear her voice than not to call. He put on his brown gabardine topcoat and a few minutes later he and his father were walking down the street together. Chedbury was peculiarly pleasant in the morning, the houses clean, the windows shining, and smoke curling softly from the chimneys. Sooner or later front doors opened and other men came briskly out to go to work. So he and his father proceeded, exchanging few words, but the silence was easy.

At the shop he fell behind to allow his father to go ahead and the men looked up and nodded and he followed his father into the rather large office.

"Sit down there," his father said. "I'll give you some proofs to read."

Edward obeyed, taking off his hat and coat and hanging them on a rack in the corner. The office had not changed during all the years he had known it, and he had often sat here in the odd hours he had helped his father during vacations.

He began to read the proofs, dull pages of a pamphlet being put out by some historical society, and it was the middle of the morning when suddenly his father spoke.

"Edward," he said solemnly, "how do you propose to make your living?"

Edward looked up. He knew that his father had shown extraordinary patience not only on this day, but during the past four

years, while he had been pursuing his somewhat leisurely way through college. The very necessity of his father's youth to make an early livelihood had made him take pride in being patient with his son.

"I think it's the first time you have ever asked me the question, Father," he said. He put down proofs and pencil, and wheeled around on his screw-bottomed chair.

"I've never had to ask you," his father said proudly. "But the time has come now when I presume you will want to earn your own way, and certainly the time has come when I'd like to ease your mother's life a little. I want her to have help in the house. She hasn't been willing so long as you were in college and the other two in school. She isn't as strong as she was—it stands to reason a woman can't be. I've told her to hire somebody this week."

"I'm glad of that," Edward said heartily, and paused.

"Well?" his father said.

Edward smiled his slight cool smile. "It would be easy to say I know what I want to do, Father, if I had any special talent. But I haven't—except a general interest in books."

"Books?" his father repeated, astonished.

"Are you surprised?" Edward inquired. "But you've printed books all these years."

"Not just books," his father corrected him. "I've printed anything that came my way—catalogues, pamphlets, bulletins, wedding announcements, Christmas cards, anything."

"I'm thinking you might like me to take the book section of the business and develop it a little," Edward said daringly.

He saw immediately that this was an entirely new and somewhat frightening idea to his father.

"Books are a risk," his father said slowly. "Look at them piled up in the second-hand shops in Boston! It scares me every time I go there. People read them once and then sell them."

"They have to buy them before they can read them," Edward argued.

"All these newfangled public libraries," his father went on. "That fellow Carnegie—the book business will sink to nothing. Who's going to buy a book if he can read it for nothing?"

"Will you take me on for a year?" Edward asked.

His father's opposition crystallized what had been the vaguest wanderings of his own mind. It was true that he did not know what he wanted to do for a livelihood. In college he had lived, by the chance of a roommate, in the midst of a group of young men who had not needed to think of work immediately after graduation, and he had fallen into the way of contemplation rather than activity. Yet he knew that this was an atmosphere entirely alien to him, and that he must indeed work with all his ability as soon as possible. But he had been graduated only last June. Beyond all else, he had felt that until he had settled the matter of his marriage with Margaret, he could not choose a livelihood. Too much depended on the life that she would want and where they might choose to live. He was somewhat perturbed now by his own abruptness in the decision he had made even for a year.

His father meanwhile had been pondering the question. "Maybe for a year," he said slowly. "I'll talk with Mather, provided you don't do anything to call for extra capital."

Edward did not reply for a moment. The business depression, which had terrified his father and had shadowed his last year at college, was perhaps beginning to recede. The banks had been saved by the millionaires, staking their fortunes against the fears of little men with nothing. His father had been almost revoltingly grateful to "the big fellows."

"If I can't convince you by the end of the year to put in some capital, I shall consider myself a failure," Edward said.

He was about to wheel his chair around again when his father raised his hand. "Wait a minute, son—I promised your mother something."

Edward saw him flush and immediately felt at ease. "Mother was cross with me in the night, I know," he said frankly. "But,

Father, if you don't mind, I'll just wait until tomorrow and then everything will be clear."

"Your mother is easily hurt, son," his father reminded him.

"I know, because she has passed that same quality on to me," Edward said quietly. "But I think it's wrong to be so quick to be wounded, and it's a trait I mean to get over."

He turned then in good earnest and picking up his pencil he went to work again, and his father said no more. They went home together at noon and only the barest words of business passed between them. They ate in almost entire silence the noon meal of meat and vegetables and an apple pie and then Edward went upstairs to his own room. He knew that Thomas Seaton slept for an hour between one and two. It was his intention to reach the house in time to see Margaret before her father waked and then, as soon as possible afterward, to appear before him.

He washed, examined his somewhat too easily growing beard, and decided to shave again. Then he dressed himself in his good dark blue serge suit, white shirt, and stiff collar. The tie he usually wore was dark blue, too, but today, thinking of Margaret, he chose one she had given him last Christmas of wine-red satin with a stripe of blue. Thus arrayed, with care to his shoes and his nails, he felt that he had done all he could, and he went downstairs and out of doors without seeing his mother or looking for her. But some impulse when he was on his way made him turn his head and he saw her standing at the sitting-room window, looking out after him, her hand over her mouth. He could not see her eyes, but he felt their painful and earnest gaze, and he lifted his arm and waved to her. With no more than an instant's hesitation she waved back to him with her white handkerchief, and at the effort, all his resentment left him. As well as he knew himself, he knew her and that she had forgiven him and he was the happier for it.

"Softhearted, that's what I am," he thought half sadly, and wondered whether his life would be the harder for his soft heart.

Thus somewhat soberly he approached the big brick house

which Chedbury merely called "Seatons'." It stood back from the street in the midst of its traditional elms, and the lawn was thick with falling leaves. No one was to be seen except the small hunched figure of old Bill Core, who tended the garden. He was gathering leaves slowly with a bamboo rake as Edward went up the brick walk.

"Anybody around?" Edward asked.

"Not that I've saw," Bill replied. He leaned on his rake. "Who're you lookin' for?"

"Margaret?" Edward said tentatively.

"Out under the apple tree behind the house last I saw," Bill said. "That was before dinner, though." He chewed slowly and grindingly, and spat a large dark brown blob into the leaves.

But Edward did not go to the apple tree. He felt some formality in the afternoon ahead of him and he went up the five marble steps to the front door of the house. There he rang the bell. Usually the maid opened the door but this time to his pleasure Margaret herself flung it wide.

"I saw you coming," she said softly. "He's just waking up. How beautiful you look! Don't you love that tie? Promise me you'll let me choose all your ties! Shall we stay outside a bit?"

"I'd rather get it over," he said, still on the threshold.

She laughed. "Poor Ned! He's not too bad, really. Though I rather think—" she broke off and shook her head.

He stepped inside the door. "Think what?" he demanded.

"I'd better not tell you."

"Margaret, tell me!" he insisted.

"No, I won't," she declared. "Because it's too silly."

"But you thought it!"

"Well, I think very silly things—often."

Before he could protest again Thomas Seaton's voice shouted suddenly from the library. "Who are you talking to, Margaret?"

She turned her head toward the voice. "To Ned, Father!"

There was a grunt to this and silence.

"He's only just waked," Margaret explained.

"Tell me what you were thinking about?" Edward said stubbornly.

"Oh, my goodness," she said suddenly. "Well, it was this—Father once had the idea that he wanted me to marry somebody—a man in New York."

"He did?" Edward exclaimed. Rage ran in his veins suddenly and he took a step toward the library. Then he turned. She was standing with both hands folded under her chin, looking at him with bright blue eyes, not laughing, and he came back.

"You can't change your mind now," he said gravely.

She shook her head. "No fear," she said.

Thereupon his rage and his pride combined and he walked into the library. The afternoon was warm, and the room was sunlit and silent. Tobacco and leather and old books scented the air with a dry and musky odor. A long window opened to the always neglected gardens and yellow leaves from an elm tree drifted across the panes. Thomas Seaton sat between the arms of a sagging leather armchair and Edward saw his grizzled red head leaning on its back.

"Is that you, Peg?" he said drowsily.

Margaret answered from the door. "Father, I told you Ned was coming to see you."

Edward turned and frowned at her. "Go away, please, Margaret," he said. "I shan't want you here while we're talking."

She made a face at him and vanished, shutting the door with unnecessary noise.

Thomas Seaton laughed. "That's right, my boy," he said in his slow rich voice. "Order her about. It's good for her. Come and sit down."

Without moving even to lift his head, he pursed his thick lips at the chair across the hearth and there Edward sat down. Margaret's father, he thought, was not prepossessing. His stained tweed vest was open and his belt unloosed, and over the brown shirt he

wore his big hands were folded. He had taken off his shoes and had put his feet on a faded brown velvet hassock. But his large sleepy face was benign and amused.

"Eh?" he said.

"There's no use my beating about the bush at this late day, Mr. Seaton," Edward said promptly. "I suppose you've noticed that I've been interested in Margaret for years."

"I've noticed," Thomas Seaton said dryly. "But there've been others."

"Well, I'm different from them all, I think," Edward said, allowing himself the smallest of smiles. "I asked her to marry me yesterday and she said she would."

"She's a very changeable miss, and it wouldn't be fair of me to keep that from you," Thomas Seaton retorted.

"She's never said 'yes' to me before, nevertheless, and I shan't let her change her mind," Edward said firmly.

Thomas Seaton laughed again. "Then what have you come to see me about?" he inquired.

"I wanted to tell you myself," Edward said. At the older man's laughter he felt his ready pride ruffle and prick and he was grave.

Thomas Seaton unfolded his hands and pulled out a yellowed silk handkerchief from his pocket and rubbed his face all over. The act seemed to wake him. He opened his eyes wide, sat up in his chair, and began to stuff tobacco into an old meerschaum pipe.

"If I must take this seriously," he said, "then I'd better put my mind to it. Margaret's my favorite child, and I can't just give her away. How are you planning to make a living, young man?"

"I hope you realize I wouldn't ask Margaret to be my wife, without giving some thought as to her support," Edward replied. "My father has the print shop as you know, Mr. Seaton. I shall help him there, and likely take it over some day."

"You aren't the only son," Thomas Seaton said in the same dry voice.

"No, sir, but I'm five years older than Baynes, and there's no

competition there. By the time he's ready to work, I'll be well up in the business—maybe its head. Dad owns the business, really. Mr. Mather has turned eighty, you know."

"Don't push your father about," the older man said suddenly.

"I wouldn't think of it," Edward replied hotly.

Thomas Seaton began to puff on his pipe. He leaned back again. "A temper of your own, I see."

"I'm sorry," Edward said instantly.

"How much do you think you'll make—let's say, at your top?"

Edward hesitated. His father made, he supposed, five or six thousand a year. Whether that would seem much or little to a Seaton he had no way of knowing. He looked into Seaton's eyes, blue and bright. "I have no way of knowing," he said frankly. "It all depends on myself. I shall do more than carry on the shop. I've told my father that I want to begin to print books for myself—publish them. That might do very well."

"You like books?" Thomas Seaton inquired.

"There's something about them," Edward admitted reluctantly. He did not wish to reveal to this observing older man the peculiar influence of books upon him. Without any desire to write a book of his own, all his creative mind stirred when he held a good book in his hand. If, after he had read it, he felt it become a part of himself, it was precious to him. He wanted it well bound and more than once he had gone to Boston and had ordered rebound in scraps of leather or mohair some book which he felt had become his own.

"Know anything about book publishing?" Thomas Seaton inquired.

"I have my own feelings about it," Edward replied.

A long silence fell upon them after this. Thomas Seaton's eyes closed and Edward wondered if he were about to fall asleep again. He waited in respectful though impatient silence. But the older man was not asleep. He began to talk, his eyes still closed.

"If you and Margaret have fixed it up, I suppose I'll have to

take it. Not that there's any objection to you in my mind! But whether you are the man for her, I don't know, and I don't suppose she knows until she has tried you."

At this Edward remembered the warnings of his mother in the night. Divorce was in this family. He would have none of that, however things went between him and Margaret. "I mean to make a success of my marriage," he said doggedly.

"So do we all," Thomas replied. "But it's more than your marriage, my boy. It's the woman, too, and she can wreck any marriage, if she's a mind to do it. Margaret's a handful, and there's no use in pretending she isn't. She gets it from her mother. I had to beat her mother once—it was with an umbrella, I remember. I'd just come back from London, and she took a fancy to some man or other while I was away. It's in their blood. I'd bought a good strong umbrella at Harridge's and when she told me the first thing that she'd changed her mind about me I said, 'No, you haven't,' and went after her with the umbrella. She cried, but I didn't give an inch. I slept with her that night, and the next day she was all right again. I never even knew the man's name."

He chuckled and Edward listened with horror. What would his mother have said to this sorry tale? Thank God she need never know!

"The moral of that is," Thomas Seaton went on, "you keep a strong hand with Margaret!"

"I'll do my best," Edward said with reserve, "though it could never come to beating—not with me."

"Ah well," Thomas Seaton said. "You'll devise your own weapons. But there's worse than an umbrella." He coughed, sat up and fumbled for his leather slippers, found them, and put them on. Then he stood up. "Peg!" he shouted.

The door opened so quickly that Edward wondered as he rose punctiliously to his feet if Margaret had been listening at the keyhole. He dismissed the thought as unworthy, but her father laughed as he sat down again.

"You've been listening, you scalawag," he said to her.

"No, I haven't," Margaret replied, dimpling. "I would have but I was afraid it might make Ned angry. He isn't used to it. I was only standing ready, on call. Do sit down, Ned."

She sat down on the hassock between the two of them, her long beautiful hands clasped about her knees.

"Well, shall he have me, Father?" she asked.

"He says he will," her father replied.

Great love was between these two, and Edward felt it jealously, as the eyes of father and daughter met and melted and spoke. It was unfair, surely, for the older man to have had the advantage of long years with her, watching her as she grew from birth to womanhood. What other man could hope to have such knowledge of her? Then it occurred to him that there was no such relation between his own father and Louise, and again he knew that there was something in this Seaton family that made them different from his own.

"But will you have him, Peg?" Thomas Seaton asked. "It goes two ways, you know."

Margaret smiled her deep dimpled smile. "It's taken me years to make up my mind," she said frankly.

"Nonsense," Edward said abruptly. "You only made it up yesterday—you know that, Margaret. Why, even yesterday morning, you were wanting to put off the picnic. And twice you—"

He stopped, aware that Thomas Seaton was listening avidly and with laughter bright in his eyes.

"Only twice?" Seaton said. "That's nothing, man! Her mother broke our engagement nine times."

He and Margaret joined in laughter offensively loud to Edward's ear. "At any rate," he said soberly, "she's made up her mind, whether yesterday or not."

Margaret turned on Edward vividly. "I began asking myself the very first day I saw you whether I'd marry you or not."

He could scarcely believe this and yet it stirred him to the bot-

tom of his soul. "But we've always known each other," he said feebly.

"I've always been asking," she said promptly.

"Then why did you turn me down so hard?" he demanded.

"Oh, you took so long to grow up," she said scornfully. "I really thought you'd never be a man—and I hate boys. You're still not really grown up, Ned, but I can see you will be, some day."

Thomas Seaton got to his feet and waved his big hands. "You two are as good as married," he said, swallowing his laughter. "Don't be too sharp with him, Peg. He's a good young man. Don't get wicked with him."

He ambled sidewise toward the door, his hands in his pockets now and his coattails in the air. "And Edward, I advise you—get yourself a good English umbrella. You'll need it."

He went out and left the two of them, taking care to close the door.

Margaret blew a kiss after him and turned to Edward warmly. "Isn't he adorable? He shut the door because he understands us. He understands everybody, I think—me best of all." She pulled the hassock forward and leaned her head upon Edward's knees. "Oh, how blissful I am!"

"Are you really happy?" Edward asked. He had been slightly repelled by her father's forethought as though the old man had coarsely imagined that they would at once want to begin to make love! But he could not resist the sight of Margaret's dark head on his knees. What grace of God that she had her mother's dark curly hair, and her father's blue eyes! With red hair she would have been quite another woman. Besides, he did not like red hair.

"Oh, happy!" she repeated dreamily. "To think I needn't worry any more about getting married! It's all settled at last, and I can put my mind to something else."

He was amazed again, and he said, withdrawing his hand from her head, "Think of what? You needn't have worried about it."

But she took his hand and pillowed her soft cheek in his palm.

"Of course I worried," she said frankly. "Every girl does. How did I know you would ask me again, and how did I know whether even if you did I would say yes? And suppose I said no, would you ask me yet again? How did I know? And suppose you didn't, what could I do, that is supposing I wanted you to ask me again?"

He sighed, and then drew her strongly into his arms. "Stop it there, Margaret," he commanded. "Just be still with me for a while, will you? I'm somewhat overcome."

She laughed softly at this, but she yielded, and he sat in the warm golden room, holding her, completely happy, except for the slight gnawing fear that the door might open suddenly to show someone's surprised face. He was chagrined that she divined the fear and rose, walked across the room and locked the door. Then she came back and curled into his arms again, and he sat holding her and feeling his love grow, second by second, until it terrified him with joy. Her right arm crept around him under his coat, and her left hand up to his cheek, and understanding, after a while, the soft steady pressure of that left hand, he yielded, turning his face to hers, and bending to her he joined his lips to hers in a long kiss.

From this kiss it was he who first moved away. He trembled at the power she had over him. Her lips, thus fastened to his, made his blood fire and his limbs were melted. He struggled against such giving up of himself. Somewhere in him, if he was to remain master of his life, there must be a place where he stood alone to survey all that he had, even her.

"Come, my dear," he said resolutely.

She looked at him languidly and he had to harden himself against the roselike face upon his breast.

"I must go home, darling," he said tenderly. "My father and mother must be told, too, you know."

He was utterly unprepared for her again. For she sprang from his arms, her face eager and even excited. "Oh, what fun!" she cried. "Now I'll come with you."

He got to his feet. "But will it be the thing to do?" he muttered.

"Why not?" she asked robustly. "Don't I have to know them? Oughtn't they to know me?"

"I suppose so," he said uncertainly.

She forgot him and looked down at herself. "This old dress!" she exclaimed passionately. "I'll have to change."

He had not noticed what she wore, but now he saw that it was a dress of faded blue linen, crumpled by his crushing her in his arms.

"What'll I wear?" she asked anxiously. Then she put her hand on his lips. "No, don't tell me—I must be myself."

With that she hastened out of the room and he went over to the window and stood looking out into the quiet weedy garden. Some old-fashioned chrysanthemums were blooming under the elms, brilliant spots of red and gold. At the end of the garden the small marble statue of a naked boy looked out mischievously from a pool choked with leaves. A year from now, he supposed, he would be married. He and Margaret would be living somewhere in Chedbury—that was a thing they had to plan, too. He would have no living with their families, neither his nor hers. There was plenty of room in this huge old house, but he would refuse to consider it. If he was to make her happy, he'd have to have her to himself.

She came back in a few minutes, wearing a new autumn suit of a heather blue and a soft felt hat. Nobody in Chedbury wore clothes like hers, so plain and soft, and she was beautiful in them.

"I got it in London," she said. "Do you like it?"

"It suits you," he said. And then overcome with her beauty he was humbled to pain. "Oh, Margaret, can you be patient with me and mine?" he asked. He took her gloved hands. "We're common folk compared to you."

She gave him a smile tender and exquisite. "I'm only marrying you—that's what we've to remember," she said.

He felt her words strong and comforting and he put his arms about her shoulder and gave her a hard squeeze. "That's right," he said heartily. "Remind me of it every morning, will you?"

They walked out into the afternoon sunlight and the sense of the

magic of his life crept into Edward's consciousness. It was impossible to imagine that his wife, his house, could be like those of any other man. Whatever the faults of others, he and Margaret were beyond their possibility. They carried happiness within themselves, in their youth and health and humor and in the quality of their love. He strode along at her side, just enough taller than she to be complacent, his step matched to hers, and hidden between them were their clasped hands.

"Ned," she said suddenly, "I'll have to tell you that I did tell Mother last night, after all."

"You did?" he cried.

"I couldn't help it. She came into my room when I was getting ready for bed and saw it all over me, I suppose. So I simply said yes, I was engaged, and she said she was glad of it."

In the agitation of his interview he had forgotten the midnight scene with his own mother. Now he thought of it and was troubled as to whether, in honesty, he should tell Margaret of his mother's doubts. He decided to postpone the telling.

"Is that all your mother said?" he asked.

"Well, she said we'd have to begin talking about when we'd have the wedding, and where we'd live."

"So we shall," he agreed, "and that brings me to the question. What do you want for a ring?"

"A sapphire," she said so promptly that he was surprised.

"Sounds as if you'd had it picked for a long time," he observed.

"I have," she said. "I know exactly where it is—in an old jewelry store in New York."

"Do you mean to say you had the ring picked before you had the man?" he demanded and was vaguely pained.

She laughed and squeezed his arm with both hands. "I began thinking about the ring the night I said I wouldn't marry you—the first time—remember?"

Did he remember! However happy he was he'd never forget that evening.

She had not paused for his answer. "And then I thought, if I ever did marry you, I'd want a sapphire, set in a wide band, and so when I went to New York—"

"Oh, Margaret! And I was suffering so, thinking you'd never have me—"

"Then you were silly. Good sapphires are fearfully hard to find—good ones, that is—and I did find one."

"But suppose it had been sold?"

"Oh, I found it only this spring, and I begged the old man to keep it for me, for I knew I'd be married sometime."

"Even if not to me, I suppose!"

"Don't be jealous, Ned, and he said I surely would, too, but just in case would I put down twenty-five dollars on account."

"Margaret, you didn't!"

"I did, so the ring is safe, and I should think you'd be glad."

He was too confounded by all this to know whether he was glad or sorry, and it took him five full minutes of contemplation. This was only brought to an end by her voice, begging him.

"Ned, please forgive me—it was awfully forward of me. I can see that now."

He was pleased to forgive and he did so fully and magnanimously. "It's odd, Margaret—there's no pretending it isn't. But it's you, and that's all that matters. We'd better go tomorrow to New York and fetch it, I suppose."

"Oh, lovely!" Her rich voice sighed out the rich word, and he knew that he had behaved well. Upon this satisfaction they entered the house and he was pleased to see that his father had just got home and had not time, therefore, to change his respectable office suit of gray cloth for the patched brown smoking jacket in which he spent his evenings, although he was on the stair.

"Father!" he called from the door.

His father turned. "Yes?"

"I've brought Margaret, Father. It's all settled—"

His father came down the two steps he had mounted and held

out his hand shyly. "Well, Margaret—we've always known each other, I guess, without much more than speaking—"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Haslatt." Margaret's voice, her outstretched hand were warm and instant.

His mother came to the door of the hall, and slipped off her apron and threw it behind her. Something had been expected, Edward surmised, for she wore her second-best black dress and she had put a fresh white ruching in the high boned collar.

"Edward, am I to congratulate you?" she asked.

Behind the stilted words he saw her as she had been last night and he met her stiffly. "Yes, please, Mother. It's all decided. I had a talk with Mr. Seaton."

"Welcome, Margaret—"

His mother, unrelentingly grave, led them into the sitting room and there Louise sat with a magazine. She got up awkwardly, her face flushing.

"Louise," her mother said formally. "Edward has come to tell us that he and Margaret are engaged."

Louise smiled a little and yielded her hand to Margaret, who clasped it and held it. "Oh, I've known Louise since she was born! I hope you won't mind me! I'm glad to have another sister."

In a moment they were all sitting down, not knowing what to say, and Margaret, her warm eyes seeing everything, began to talk rapidly and gaily.

"Oh, I hope you will all like me—because I do so like all of you. I'm going to try so hard to make Ned a good wife. You'll have to teach me lots, Mrs. Haslatt. Mother's a dreadful housekeeper, in fact. She just doesn't keep house—but I want to be good at it. I don't even want a maid, because if I have one I'll never learn for myself. May I come sometimes on Saturdays and learn, dear Mrs. Haslatt?"

There never was so enchanting a woman, Edward told himself and he saw without surprise that his mother was melting.

"Well, I don't know, I'm sure, that I'm such a wonder," she began.

"Yes, you are, Mother," he said heartily, "and I shall take it as a kindness if you'll tell Margaret everything. I'm sure she's right when she says she doesn't know anything."

He was surprised to hear himself talking in this easy Seaton fashion to his own mother, and she looked at him suspiciously but was silent. Margaret picked up the silver ball of talk where he dropped it.

"Ned, I'll surprise you! I can learn when I want to, and I'm going to buy a little book and put everything into it. 'Mrs. Haslatt's muffins,' 'Mrs. Haslatt's cream tomato soup—'" She broke off. "I can't go on saying Mrs. Haslatt, can I? I'll say Mother Haslatt."

Edward saw his father absorbing all this, drinking in Margaret's warmth and charm and beauty, his eyes yearning and his mouth open under his gray mustache. Louise, too, was gazing at Margaret, forgetting her shyness, leaning forward on her elbows. Only his mother struggled against her own yielding.

"Maybe Edward will like new ways," his father said slowly.

Edward felt as his own the potential hurt to his mother in these words.

"There's nothing I like better than the way Mother cooks," he said quickly.

"I didn't mean that," his father replied. "I think it's only right for young people to do differently from the old ones. I'd expect that."

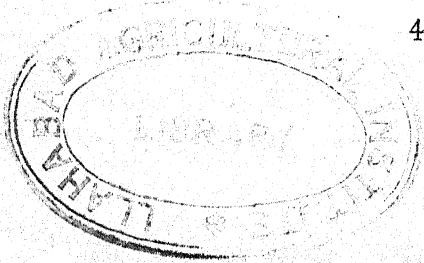
"I'm sure I don't want them to copy my ways," his mother said in the suppressed voice whose misery Edward recognized at once.

"We understand," Margaret said.

Edward got up. "Margaret, I must get you home," he said with authority.

She rose. "All right, Ned." Then she turned impulsively to his mother. "Mrs. Haslatt, will you let us have him tonight for dinner? Is it too selfish of me? But we haven't seen my mother yet—not together. I'll send him home early."

Now his mother was compelled to speak. "I suppose it's all right. Though I have his supper here ready—"



Mark Haslatt spoke suddenly. "Let him go, Ruth. There are not many days like these in any man's life."

The suppressed feeling in all of them was released suddenly with these words and it filled the room. Edward wanted to get away. "I'll be back early, Mother," he muttered. He took Margaret's arm and hurried her away.

The evening was like none he had ever spent in the Seaton house, but then he had never been accepted into the family before. Margaret brought him into the library, pulling him gently with her hand in his. She was the middle child, and her elder brother Tom and her younger sister Sandra were already there, with their parents.

"We always gather in the library for a bit before dinner," she said. It was Seaton to call it dinner, he thought, and he wondered if in his own house his supper would be dinner. He frowned slightly, thinking of how many such things remained ahead of him to decide. For that the decision was chiefly to be his it would not have occurred to him to doubt.

They all looked at him with friendly faces as he came in, but nobody moved. He knew that they had been talking about the engagement, and he felt kindness in the air, although it was restrained. Tom he knew casually, without intimacy, and Sandra he had noticed chiefly because she was about Louise's age, but so much prettier that he had felt sorry for Louise. She had a bright pert face, and Thomas Seaton had given her his red hair. Margaret's mouth was delicate in its fullness but Sandra's was sulky. Tom did not lift his tall loose-boned body from the deep chair in which he sat, but he grinned. Some shyness made Edward want to draw his fingers from Margaret's, but she held him firmly and marched straight to her mother.

Mrs. Seaton sat in a high-backed red velour-covered chair by the fireplace. The fire had been lit, and since the lamp was shaded the light from the flames flickered over her beautiful and willful



face, still so young under the rolls of her white hair. She wore a black velvet gown, old-fashioned in its fullness, and there was a ruffle of white lace about her neck.

"Mother," Margaret said abruptly. "I asked Ned to dinner so that you could get to know him."

Mrs. Seaton put out a hand long and slender like Margaret's, but it was bright with rings. When Edward took it in his hand he knew that although it looked like Margaret's it was soft as hers could never be. There was steel somewhere in Margaret's hand.

"You're so silly, Meg," Mrs. Seaton murmured. "How can I get to know him in one evening?"

"You've got to like him in one evening anyway, Mother, because I'm going to marry him."

"Is there any reason why I should not like you?" Mrs. Seaton inquired, looking at Edward with her direct brown gaze.

"Sit down, my boy," Thomas Seaton intervened. "Don't let yourself be made the center of a sparring match between two women. Tom, why don't you exert yourself?"

Tom did not move. "He may as well know me at my worst, Father," he said in a pleasant deep voice.

"Do sit down, Ned," Margaret said. "Sandra, why are you speechless?"

"Because it seems so odd to think you're going to get married," Sandra retorted. She sat on the leather hassock, bent over so the skirt of her green velvet frock flowed over her feet. "Besides," she said in the drawling voice which was her present affectation, "I can't stand up or he'll see how short this old frock is. Father's too stingy to get me a new one. Edward, that's the kind of family you're marrying into!"

"She's lying, Ned," Margaret said carelessly. "The trouble is she wants one of the new sheath things and Father has only just let me have one."

She went out of the room with her light and springing tread and Edward sat down, feeling more shy and yet excited than he had

ever before been in his life. This was the first of many times that he would be in this room with this family. "It won't be so hard after this, though," he thought doggedly and he sat, impervious and silent, under their frank stares. They had all "dressed," as Margaret put it, in some fashion for their evening meal. He had never been here when there was not a party and so he supposed that this was their habit. Even Thomas Seaton had put on an old black velvet coat with his tweed trousers. Tom wore a somewhat old-fashioned tuxedo that did not entirely fit him. Sandra continued her conversation.

"You are so stingy, Papa. You make poor Tom wear your old tux."

"Shut up, Sandra," Tom said amiably.

"It's a good suit of clothes," Thomas Seaton said. "I'd wear it myself if I could get into it."

"But the depression's over and I don't see why—"

"Do be quiet, Sandra," her mother interposed. "I'm sure we're all bored with you."

Silence fell again, and Thomas Seaton leaned over a small table at his side and poured some sherry from a crystal decanter into a small glass. "Take this to your new relative," he commanded his daughter.

Edward sprang to his feet. "I'll get it for myself, thank you." He took the tiny glass with strong feelings of interest and guilt. He had not tasted wine half a dozen times in his life, and his mother worked in the temperance society in Chedbury. Had he believed in it he would have proudly refused the wine, but he disliked intensely the feverishness of women against liquor, even though his reason acknowledged that some of them had undoubtedly endured enough from drunken husbands and empty pay envelopes to justify their fervor. But his father was a teetotaler, and he resented his mother's devotion to a cause so remote from her. He sat down again and sipped his wine.

"I'm glad to see you like a glass of wine," Thomas Seaton said.

"Not that what you and I do, and Tom here and a few more like us, will do any good—we're in for a period of morality, my boy. I can feel it coming. The depression scared us to death and we'll be good for a while."

"I'm going to learn to smoke, Papa." Sandra's confident drawl interrupted his slow hesitating rumbling.

"I don't care what you do," Thomas retorted. He was holding his glass against the firelight, squinting one eye through it. "You and your mamma can both smoke if it'll comfort you for getting old."

They pronounced it Papa' and Mamma' with the accent on the last syllable in a fashion that seemed foreign to Edward and yet that he knew was not affected. They had manners of their own but these were not what had been taught to him as manners. He sat alert and silent, appreciating the ease of this family, valuing without knowing why he did the glint on velvet, the whiteness of Mrs. Seaton's hands folded on her lap, the faded red of the long curtains drawn now across the window. Tom's aquiline profile, sleepy and smiling, was part of it.

"Margaret's taking a long time," Tom said suddenly. He turned to Edward. "You know, I admire your courage. What'll I call you—Ed? She's laid down the law against Ned. That's her own private name. We have to obey her or she has tantrums."

"She doesn't have tantrums," his father said in his slow heavy voice. "You don't know what tantrums are, Tom. You should have seen your mother at Margaret's age. Screaming and shouting when I didn't give you your way, didn't you, my love? But they get over it."

Mrs. Seaton smiled and produced two dimples exactly like Margaret's in the unflawed smoothness of her cheeks. "I wouldn't compete with you, old dear," she said sweetly. "When I shouted you yelled. It got so tiresome. I always lost my voice afterward, I remember."

"You see, Edward," Thomas Seaton said complacently.

"They're lying, both of them," Tom said lazily. "We can't believe a word they say. They make themselves out as hellions when they were our age."

"Anything we do they always pretend they've done worse," Sandra said. "It makes us feel so inferior."

Had they laughed Edward would have joined in their laughter, but they were mischievously grave and he could only smile with discomfort. They would take knowing, he told himself.

At this moment Margaret came into the room, looking, he perceived at once, beautiful beyond anything he had ever seen. She had put on a pale gold sleeveless gown, very long, that fitted her body closely. It was split up the front to a point below her knees and her gold-clad legs were visible. Above the dress her dark head was high and her eyes were sapphire blue and bright. They were all startled and she enjoyed their amazement. Edward knew that she was a vision and he hated the way she looked. She turned around slowly. "I wanted to wear it the first time tonight," she declared. "When it's old I shall keep it and remember."

All of them were looking at her differently. Tom said nothing, but he lit a cigarette and gazed at her, over the curling smoke. Her mother looked critical. "I wonder if women will really take to these tight things," she murmured. "They make such demands on the figure."

"It's sweet!" Sandra cried. "Oh, I can't bear its being so sweet. I want to tear up this old thing of mine!"

"It'll make new men of us all," Thomas declared wickedly.

Tom burst into high laughter and then they all laughed except Edward. He could manage no more than a smile, being rent in two by Margaret's beauty and his own deep distrust of beauty in this shape. When she was his wife he would forbid her wearing such dresses. "The sooner we're married the better," he thought grimly.

He found his eyes caught suddenly by Mrs. Seaton's as though she knew what he was thinking. Then she moved her eyes away

quickly. "Come along, we're starving," she declared, and led them behind her toward the dining room. He and Margaret went last of all.

"Don't you like me?" she whispered, her hand warm under his arm.

"I'm not sure I do," he replied.

"Oh, why not?" she asked.

"You're too beautiful," he said and was glad there was time for no more talk.

The evening was over. He was surprised that it had proved so short, in spite of his fears during dinner that it would be long. The family had talked exactly as though he were not present, throwing him a careless handful of words, a reference he could not understand, with smiles always warm and pleasing. They had talked about everything from the grocer's amazing profile to what Thomas Edison had just said about the new flying machines. For the first time in his life he heard the word helicopter, although Tom used it as though it were a household utensil. Thomas Seaton paused for a few minutes in his enjoyment of the stuffed leg of lamb to express his scorn of William Jennings Bryan.

"You've never even seen him," his wife said.

"I've read enough of his sentimental mouthings," he retorted, "and any man who wears his hair long is sure to be unsound."

In the midst of talk that seemed disconnected but was connected, as he perceived, by unseen waves of communication, Edward caught Margaret looking often and thoughtfully at him. He looked back at her, fully aware that some time before they parted this night he would learn what these looks meant. He braced himself somewhat, determined that he would not yield his honest opinion and from that instant began to enjoy the really excellent food.

After dinner everybody had coffee in small cups except Thomas Seaton who parted his short thick beard with his fingers and supped his creamed and sweetened coffee with loud pleasure from

a large cup. There was a little desultory talk, then Sandra drifted away and Tom announced that he was going to "see a girl," Mrs. Seaton went gently to sleep, and Thomas picked up the newspaper.

Margaret motioned to Edward. "Come into the garden, Ned."

"I'll fetch your coat."

"It's warm as anything," she objected.

"Where is your coat?" he asked stubbornly when they were in the hall and waited until suddenly she laughed and opened the coat closet and took out her old blue coat.

In the garden, sitting on an iron seat that felt hard and cold through his clothes, she threw the coat back. The moonlight fell on her bare smooth arms and shoulders.

"I shouldn't have worn this dress," she said. "It was silly, perhaps. No, it wasn't—feeling as I do about tonight."

"I shan't like you wearing it before other men," he said.

She turned her startled face toward him. "You think it's not modest?"

"I know it's not," he returned.

She smiled, but not quite enough to bring the dimples. "Now, Ned, how do you know?" she asked warmly. "What makes you feel it's immodest?"

He was shocked by this and made no pretense of hiding his feelings. "I don't think you should even ask."

"You mean I mustn't ask you how you feel when a woman is immodestly dressed?" she asked.

"No," he replied. "It's not fitting."

She considered this. Then suddenly she put the coat on again. "Are you ashamed of the way you feel?" she inquired. Her eyes, wide and curious, were fixed on his face and he could not down his quick flush.

"Margaret, I don't like this talk," he said firmly. He wished that she would not look at him as she was now doing. There was something provocative, teasing, amused, something almost wicked in

her persistent gaze. He wanted to punish her, to restore her to what he felt was proper decency. He was afraid of her when she was like this, and he proceeded to choose his weapons. "It makes me think of what my mother said last night," he began.

"Ah, you told your mother last night!" she cried.

"I was going to tell you."

"But you didn't tell me, Ned, and I did tell you."

"We got talking about the ring."

"What did she say last night?" she demanded.

He considered. "I won't tell you," he said at last. "You won't forget it."

"Will you tell me if I tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

"What my mother said last night—when I told her."

He considered again. Curiosity overwhelmed him. No, it was more than curiosity—it was necessity. He ought to know what her mother thought of him, indeed, he must know in order that he might start fair and square.

"What did she say?" he asked abruptly.

"Will you tell me?"

"I suppose so."

Margaret withdrew a little and composed herself to speak in a clear distinct voice. "She said, 'How will you manage when he doesn't laugh at your jokes?'" She looked at him with frank eyes, in which there was a touch of pity.

"Is that all?" he asked.

She was astonished. "Do you want anything worse?" she demanded.

"I don't think that's so bad," he said.

"Oh, dear." She covered her face with both hands. "Oh, dear, oh, dear," she murmured under her breath. She took her hands away again. "Ned, I can't marry you!"

He was frightened by the gravity of her look and he humbled himself. "I don't think what either of our mothers says matters,"

he said stoutly. "My mother said you'd be a bad housekeeper and even that maybe someday you'd talk about divorce. But what does she know?"

"But of course I'm a bad housekeeper," Margaret declared, "and I don't doubt sometimes I'll want to be divorced."

"Margaret!" he cried wildly.

"All married people do," she went on, "and the only difference is that the ones who really love each other tell each other everything and the others don't dare to."

He was stupefied by this, and he was as still as the stone boy in the fountain behind them.

"Oh!" Margaret cried. "But you mustn't let me go, of course—never—never—whatever I say."

She flung herself into his arms and he held her hard and all his courage and stubbornness came flooding back into him. His head was whirling but his heart was calm.

"I don't understand you," he said between set teeth. "I never know what to expect. I suppose I never will. But whatever it is you are—I shan't let you go—ever!"

He put his face into the soft curves of her neck, where her hair curled upward, and he was half suffocated with his love.

"Oh!" Margaret sighed, after a long time. "I'm perfectly happy, Ned—even though I know I'll often make you miserable. Please, Ned, forgive me for everything that's going to happen?"

"I'll forgive you everything," he muttered, and was terrified by his weakness.

The prospects of marriage deepened the acquisitive instincts in Edward Haslatt. These were already strong, for he was of a nature that drew to himself what he wanted, and what he had he held. Any impulse to share was secondary and acquired, implanted only by his sense of justice.

Now that Margaret had promised to marry him he became obsessed with the necessity for a home and the means to maintain it.

Had his father's business been one that he disliked or thought unsound he would have deserted it in search of something better. But he liked printing. Even as a boy he had enjoyed visiting the shop and after school and in the long vacations, he had besought his father for the lowly positions of errand boy and later of printer's devil. Until his father had become a partner, however, these had been steadily refused, lest Mather or Loomis imagine that he, Mark Haslatt, was trying to get his son into the business. When Loomis died his father had still feared old Robert Mather, and not until Edward's last year of college had he allowed him to come freely into the shop to help with the presses. He had been gratified to discover how much his son already knew about type and was only troubled lest Edward might want new and rare types that could not be used often enough to justify the expense.

"For what we do here now, old-fashioned Scotch type is about all we need," he told Edward. "Of course we have a few special types to please fussy customers, and for wedding announcements and such. You can tie up a lot of money in type that you don't use once in ten years."

Edward had listened respectfully to such advice for as long as he could remember. Now, however, with the promise of being allowed to print a book or two, he pondered it afresh. He genuinely loved books and the prospect of building up, very slowly, of course, what might some day grow into a real publishing house excited him in a measure only second to his marriage. Yet whatever rashness he held in his nature was completely quelled by the necessity of supporting a wife and the children he wanted and expected. His salary concerned him constantly and he urged his father to consult Mr. Mather at the first possible moment, so that he and Margaret would know what they were to live on. His father was pessimistic.

"Bob Mather is so old he doesn't know why anybody needs much to live on," he told Edward one evening. They were in the sitting room and Edward was at home only because Margaret and

her mother had gone to New York to buy her trousseau. Secretly Edward had not approved of this. After they were married he would not be able to afford New York clothes and Margaret would have to do with the Chedbury dressmaker. But he did not tell her this, since her father was still paying her bills.

His father, in his shirt sleeves, was sitting in an old Morris chair beside the stove and in other days Edward might also have been without his coat. The permeating influence of Harvard, however, and now of the Seatons compelled him to other ways, even in the home sitting room, and he was encouraged by his mother, who thought it was "nice" of him.

"I'll want two thousand dollars a year," Edward argued.

"Old Mather won't see why," he replied, without lifting his eyes from the newspaper.

"Then I shall look for a job somewhere else," Edward said.

"Well, I'll do what I can," his father replied. He appeared absorbed in his paper.

"When will you, Father?" Edward urged. He was fidgeting over the rack of magazines at the end of the sofa. The slowness of time was intolerable. Margaret had set the wedding for Christmas Eve—a bad time, he thought, for it would be all mixed up with Christmas. But she had persisted, declaring that it would be wonderful to wake up on Christmas morning married. "I've always loved Christmas," she declared, "and now it'll be wonderful." He felt beset with the problems as well as the joys of marriage.

"Hm?" his father asked vaguely. "Well, maybe tomorrow. I have to take some papers up to him anyway."

Robert Mather was too old to come to the office now but every new job had to be laid before him, with full estimates of what it would cost. He examined the figures through his small, sharply focused spectacles and decided whether the job was worth doing. Edward knew his father dreaded these visits to the bedridden old man, but he performed them as his duty, never forgetting that half the business still belonged to Mather.



"Would it be unwise to put the matter of my salary to him at the same time that you are submitting estimates?" he suggested.

His father rubbed his head meditatively. "Well, I'll judge," he said at last. "If Mather's in a good mood, it might be as well to put it to him. If he ain't—I'll see."

He went back to his paper and then a moment later put it down. "Have you thought any of living with one side or the other? I don't know how your mother and Margaret would get along—nor yet how you would do up there. But as far as I'm concerned, if Margaret would do her share in the house—"

"We both feel we must set up our own home," Edward said positively.

"Maybe it's best," his father agreed mildly. This time his attention to his paper was permanent, and the minutes dragged until bedtime.

Chedbury still being empty of Margaret, Edward spent the next morning at the shop, drawing up the estimates on a pamphlet that advertised a life insurance firm. He paused to ponder the matter of life insurance. What if he should die? True, he was young and very healthy, yet completely healthy men could drown or could break their necks in astonishingly simple ways. He made up his mind that old Mather must agree to two thousand dollars or he would leave Chedbury and go to Boston or even to New York.

By evening when his father came home there was no such clear-cut decision offered for him to accept or refuse.

"Well, old Mather said he wouldn't approve more than eighteen hundred the first year, son—but if you worked out good, he'd see about the two hundred extra after that."

"The old skinflint!" Edward spluttered. "I've a good mind to throw it all up."

"I know how you feel," his father said, "but there's a lot of things to consider. Old Mather isn't going to last forever. In fact, he looked bad today. I should be surprised if he lasted out another year."

Edward was silent while prudence worked in him. Chedbury was in a good geographical position, near enough to several big cities to solicit business and yet far enough away to keep overhead costs low. To move elsewhere now would mean extra expense, in addition to uncertainty. Young men fresh from Harvard were no rarity on the market. "Is there any chance of buying Mather out?" he inquired.

His father grinned. "I've been dreaming of that for the last ten years. But I'd need twenty thousand dollars—of which I have five at present."

Then his father sighed and went upstairs with lagging steps, and his mother put her head in the door to announce that she needed more wood for the kitchen stove. Edward rose and went out into the woodshed at the back of the house. It was sunset and the luminous quiet sky spread over the town. His fretfulness faded. Under this sky his beloved was speeding homeward to him. He was meeting her at half past nine, and there was nothing else in the day now except that he would see her. He filled the woodbox with energy, fed his brother's hound dog, and ate a large supper in rising spirits. When he let himself out of the house at nine o'clock his courage was high. The train was fifteen minutes late and at quarter to ten he had Margaret's hands in his and only Mrs. Seaton's imperious cries that there were seven boxes kept him from taking her in his arms. The train stopped three minutes at Chedbury, being bound for larger places, and he dashed into the car to collect the boxes, surprised, in the midst of all his haste, that Margaret had been so extravagant as to take a Pullman, in spite of its being only a day journey to New York.

But tonight he was disposed to criticize her for nothing. They sat side by side in the Seaton carriage, their hands clasped under the robe, while Mrs. Seaton described the unutterable difficulties of shopping in New York. Once at home she declared herself exhausted and went directly upstairs to bed, whither Thomas Seaton had already gone, and Margaret pulled Edward by the hand into

the parlor and there behind closed doors they ended their first separation. She flung herself into his arms and he held her to his heart.

"Oh," she breathed at last, "it's terrible being so in love that it makes you miserable!"

She laughed, freed herself from his arms, and shook her skirts. Then she dropped upon the couch. "Did you miss me?" she demanded.

"Every moment," he replied, sitting down beside her.

"I would have missed you if there'd been a second to do it in," she declared frankly. "Oh, Ned, when you see my wedding dress!"

She closed her eyes in ecstasy and clasped her hands behind her head.

"Tell me," he begged, his eyes upon the lovely line of her throat.

"I can't," she answered. "It's to be a cloud of lace. I'm wearing Mother's veil, of course, and she's going to let me have her pearl necklace. I love being married!"

"It's more than the wedding—" he began but she stopped him.

"Don't tell me!" she cried. "I want to enjoy every moment of it as it comes. Just now I'm only thinking of the wedding. When I'm through that I'll think about what comes next and next and next."

She flouted his sober look and then repented and laid her head on his shoulder. "What did you really think about while I was gone?" she demanded.

He put his arm about her, feeling patient and much older than she. "About money mostly," he replied.

"Why money?" she inquired dreamily.

"Because we want our own house to live in, and we want to buy our own bread—"

"And butter," she went on, "and jam."

He broke in on this. "Father asked old Mather how much salary I could have and he said eighteen hundred the first year and two thousand afterward—if everything went right."

"That's plenty," she said still dreamily. "I have a lot of clothes."

"It isn't plenty," he retorted. "I wish to God I could buy the old devil out!"

"Why don't you?" she inquired, and she lifted her forefinger and followed the line of his profile. "You have such a nice nose," she murmured, "and your mouth, sir, is handsome."

He ignored this although he heard it with pleasure. "It would take twenty thousand dollars," he said.

She sat up and stared at him. "Did you know I have twelve thousand dollars of my own? . . . Don't look so shocked—it's true."

"That has nothing to do with me," he said stiffly. In his heart he had often feared that she had money and would not be wholly dependent upon him.

"My grandmamma left it to me, because I was named for her. She left Tom five thousand which he has spent, and Sandra has five thousand which she hasn't spent, because she hasn't got it yet. And I haven't spent mine for the same reason—but I'm to have it the day I marry. That was in Grandmamma's will."

This horrifying information she gave him without the slightest perception of how he would feel when he heard it. He determined instantly that he would never touch any of her money.

"I shall give the money straight to you and you can buy off Mr. Mather, and I'll make my father give you the rest," she went on.

"No!" he exclaimed, stung at last to speech. "I'd never get over the shame."

She sat upright. "What shame?" she demanded.

"I shall support you myself," he announced.

"Why, of course," she agreed, her blue eyes wide and sparkling, "but I want to put my money into our business. And Papa won't mind."

He got to his feet and began to walk up and down the floor, and then he paused before her. "Margaret, if you ask your father for one cent's help for me I'll—I'll—"

"Break the engagement?" she inquired with bright curiosity.



He looked down into the enchanting face. "No," he groaned.

"Then I will do it for you," she declared pretending to pout.

"Please, Margaret," he begged. "Don't tease me."

"Then promise me to take my money," she said.

Cold sweat broke across his forehead. "Don't, darling, please!"

"I was going to buy you something out of the money anyway," she said remorselessly. "Some pearl studs or maybe one of those new motor cars—or a yellow diamond ring for your little finger."

"Now Margaret," he exclaimed, "what would I do with any of those things?"

"So why not take the money and make it work for you—and me, too?" she retorted.

He stood, impressed against his will by this argument, and she pursued ruthlessly her slight advantage. "Don't you see, I'll still be dependent on you," she urged. "If you don't do your work well, we'll be ruined. Doesn't that satisfy you, Ned?"

"You've mixed me all up," he complained.

"Oh, you're so proud!" she cried. "I want you to support me, Ned. I don't want my own money. I'll keep thinking all the time how I could buy a ticket to Europe—when I'm angry with you. Of course I'll often be angry, Ned, and so will you, and it'll be a mercy if all the money we have is tied up so we can't get it."

The end of all this impetuous talk, this soft pleading, reinforced by her arms around his neck and her clinging body, was to destroy him so completely that he agreed to take the money, which however should be kept in her name, and the stocks it bought held in her name. He would not take money from her father, but he would ask his own father to put in his five thousand, and maybe somewhere they could borrow or scrape together the three thousand more.

Margaret flung herself on the sofa in exhaustion. "Oh, thank God, it's settled!" she sighed. "But if you're always going to be so hard to convince, Ned, I'll not live long."

He ignored this and presented her with the next problem.

"Where shall we live, Margaret? Not with your parents or mine, anyway."

To his surprise it appeared that she already knew where they were to live. "I know—we'll rent the old Holcombe house. It's been empty ever since I first saw it and picked it out."

"Margaret, have pity on me," he begged.

She opened her eyes at him. "But it is a lovely house, and all that land around it—"

"It's half a mile from town," he objected.

Everybody in Chedbury knew the Holcombe house and Sunday schools had picnicked for years on the neglected grounds. Old Mrs. Holcombe had been born and had died there when Edward and Margaret were children and her husband had gone away to finish his days in England. Stanley Holcombe had been a don at Oxford when his wife had brought him here to write the many books he had always wanted to write. Strange to say, he had written several of them, and Edward wondered now if his first impulse toward books had not come from the tall delicate-faced Englishman. He had seen him sometimes in the shop, whither Mr. Holcombe came to consult about paper and types and bindings. Twice he had tried to persuade Mr. Loomis to undertake a private printing, but Mr. Loomis had been afraid of it.

"That house will cost much more than we can afford," Edward objected.

"No, it won't," Margaret contradicted him in a fierce whisper. "You'll see!"

When he shook his head and looked doubtful she declared willfully, "Anyway, that is where I am going to live after I am married, and it would be nicer if you'd live with me." Then she sighed. "I'm fearfully tired, Ned. Please go home." She rose and tugged at him until he was on his feet. "Good night, Ned. I do love you."

She kissed him once, a long soft pressure of her lips upon his, and then slipped out of the room and left him there. He stood a moment listening to the clip-clap of her heels on the stairs and

realized that she was not coming back and that there was nothing for him except to go home.

Walking along alone through the sharp night air he considered again the matter of her money. He still disliked the thought of it, but his conscience was consoled somewhat by the fact that it would still be hers. When he let himself into the house, through the open door of the sitting room he saw his father at the dining-room table, a paper shade over his eyes, working at sheets of paper. He went in surprised, and his father looked up at him with a faint smile. "Your mother's gone to bed, but I've been figuring all day how I could buy old Mather out. There's no way, unless I mortgage the house, and I've always told your mother I wouldn't do that, come whatever."

What he had not been willing to do for his own sake he was now suddenly happy that he could do for his father's. "I've been talking to Margaret," he said. He sat down and pulled the sheets of figures toward him. "Seems she's going to get twelve thousand dollars the day we're married—by her grandmother's will. I didn't know it until today. She wants to put it in the business."

His father sat back and pushed up the shade. "Well," he breathed, "well, now!"

"I didn't want her to do it at first. You know how I'd feel," Edward went on.

His father's face fell. "Of course not," he said slowly.

"But she insisted. You know how the Seatons are—she's a Seaton, if there ever was one—and so I told her I'd only consent if she kept it in her own name and we'd give her stock in exchange," Edward said.

His father's face lit again. "That we could do," he exclaimed.

"Still it won't be enough," Edward said.

They looked at each other. "I wouldn't mortgage the house," his father said softly, "but I could borrow."

"I don't own a thing," Edward sighed.

"Should I tell your mother?" his father asked. The inquiry was

directed to his own conscience, as Edward knew, and he did not answer it. "Funny how women have to be so sure of a roof and a bed," his father mused. "I reckon it's because they feel helpless."

They sat silent again. Suddenly his father shuffled the papers together. "I won't tell. I'll just do it. We'll get it paid back before she knows it."

"All right, Father," Edward said.

He watched his father's absorbed face. Small lines disappeared, and the pursed lips loosened into a smile. His father looked up. "It looks like one of my dreams, anyway, will come true," he said shyly.

He spent the next months waiting for his wedding day and in two frames of mind. There were hours when he was convinced that Christmas Eve would never come, so intolerably did the dawns rise and the twilights fall, and other hours when he felt the day was rushing upon him with something like doom. He was much disturbed by this variance in himself, but it did not occur to him to tell anyone of it. Was there in him somewhere a real reluctance to marriage and if so, could it possibly mean a lack of male vitality? This was a horrifying thought and it made him moody and withdrawn, although he went as usual every evening to see Margaret. As the autumn days had changed to frost and then to cold, their picnics and walks had become hours before the fire in the library, where, after a brief half hour or so of desultory talk with a Seaton or two, they were left alone until eleven o'clock, an hour that Edward had arbitrarily set for going home.

Usually these evenings sped by, for Margaret had samples of carpets and curtains and they discussed the placing of furniture in the rooms of Holcombe's old house, which was now being repaired. The house and its changes were Thomas's wedding present to his daughter and Margaret took passionate delight in every detail. With a wisdom whose depth Edward did not at first divine she had announced that she would not buy a stick of furniture or

a yard of carpet, or so much as a sofa pillow without Edward's cooperation and approval.

"Our house is as much your home as mine," she told him.

He was accustomed to his mother's complete power over the house and this new responsibility pleased him and at the same time frightened him. He knew nothing of house furnishing, and his ignorance and Margaret's decisive tastes might very well provide more cause for quarrel than for cooperation.

In one of his darker moods therefore he surveyed one evening samples of stair carpet that she had waiting on the table.

"The real problem is whether we want the blue or the rusty rose," Margaret said.

"Why not this brown?" he inquired gloomily.

He picked a small square of a dun shade that was almost the color of dust.

"You don't feel well tonight, Ned," Margaret said.

"I'm all right," he replied.

Her penetrating blue eyes did not give him up. "Something is wrong," she declared.

He shook his head.

She went on remorselessly. "You get this way every week or so. And I have to guess what it is."

He sat down and lit his new pipe. He had never smoked regularly before, but Thomas had advised him to take up pipe smoking before marriage. "It's a wonderful help," Thomas had said, his eyes laughing under his brushy red brows. "If you have your pipe in your mouth you can't answer right off."

"I know because I feel the same way," Margaret said, her eyes still on his face. He met them and maintained his silence and she continued the one-sided conversation. "Sometimes I just don't want to get married, either."

His heart congealed. The shades of reluctance fled and he cried out, "Margaret, what are you saying?"

"Not that I don't want to marry you, Ned—just that sometimes

I feel queer about getting married, now that I really am going to do it."

He took the pipe out of his mouth. "You're sure you will?"

"It's in the abstract, yet—oh, Ned, you mustn't fill your pipe so full, darling!"

A coal of tobacco had fallen upon his coat and she flew to brush it off and examine the damage. A slight brown stain clung to the gray cloth. "Dad fills it only a little over half full."

She took the pipe from his hand and knocked it slightly upon the hearthstone, and he felt silly. But she was unself-conscious as she put it back in his mouth.

"You smoke and let me talk a bit," she said briskly. "That's why Dad smokes, you know—so Mother can talk and he needn't answer."

He spluttered at this. "Now Margaret, how do you know that?" he demanded.

She laughed. "Oh, I know his tricks," she exclaimed. She seated herself on his knee and pulled gently at the lobe of his ear. "Of course I can only guess how you feel, Ned—but here's my guess. We want to get married—we want to marry each other—but when we think about starting off alone in the house, having only each other and being dependent just on each other, well—"

She looked so grave that again he felt frightened. He put down his pipe on the small table beside him and drew her to him. "Don't you dare feel so," he commanded. "Else I'll take you to the justice of the peace and we won't wait for the wedding day."

"Isn't it the way you feel?" she insisted.

"I reckon," he said reluctantly. Where would he ever hide his soul if she could so divine it?

"There's only one cure for feeling afraid of each other," she said and her cheek was against his breast.

"Time," he suggested.

"No, this," she replied.

He held her close then, and they were silent and he felt the

rightness of what she had said. To come closer was the answer. He must remember never to yield to remoteness. When he felt far then he must force himself to come near, and in the nearness distance would be no more. It would take an effort of will, even though he loved her so dearly.

"Two must grow used to being one," she murmured upon his breast.

"Yes," he agreed, and then felt the monosyllable too brief. He made an effort. "You'll have to teach me to say things. I live so much in silence."

She replied, "I'll ask you what you are thinking when I want to know, and you must tell me."

She fell silent then, and when he looked down upon her face he saw her gazing into the fire, her eyes steady. She was strongly built, not too thin, but she was so soft, her frame so pliable, that she fitted every curve of his body, and when he held her like this she seemed small and light. His dark mood was gone and he felt only unutterable tenderness. Passion was somewhere waiting but he kept it there. This was only the approach to marriage.

Suddenly, carelessly, the weeks began to gallop, and then he realized that there were no more of them. It became a matter of days, then hours and each hour was no longer than a minute. The two families swung into tense action. Clothes, flowers, food, invitations, the formalities of bridesmaids and best man and parties left him scarcely time to think even of Margaret. Their life together was postponed. At night, when they were alone for a little while they clung together without speaking. "Let me be tired, Ned," Margaret begged. "I have to keep up before everybody else."

"You needn't keep up before me—ever," he said.

"Oh, blessed!" she sighed. "That's why I love you."

He had asked Baynes to be his best man, and then fearful lest a younger brother take such responsibility too lightly, he asked Tom Seaton to keep an eye on him and see that he did his duty.

Tom, growing fond of young Baynes, exerted himself unusually and a comradeship sprang up between them. Yet it was Baynes who did duty on the night before the wedding. Tom had let himself get drunk at the bachelors' dinner, and Baynes volunteered to be the one to take him home and put him to bed in the slumbering Seaton house.

"You go to bed," Baynes had muttered to Edward. His gray eyes crinkled. "You need your sleep, old man." So Edward had helped them into a hired cab and let them go.

But Margaret heard the front door open and she came to the stairs, her hair down on her shoulders and a blue kimono wrapped around her. When she saw Tom she ran down the steps, her bare feet noiseless.

"Oh, Tom!" she whispered. "You *would*—you miserable sinner!"

Tom smiled without opening his eyes or making a sound. He swayed back and forth on his feet and Baynes caught him.

"I don't believe he's going to walk up the stairs," Baynes whispered. Without being told he knew that this must be conducted in silence.

"He will, too," Margaret retorted.

With expertness she lifted Tom's hand and bit his thumb and at the same instant clapped her hand over his mouth. Above her head Tom's eyes opened reproachfully.

"Hayfoot-strawfoot," she commanded.

He moved his feet sluggishly and she wound his arm around her shoulder.

"Get under his other arm," she whispered to Baynes.

He obeyed and together they moved up the stairs and into Tom's bedroom. They went to the bed and he dropped upon it. Baynes took off his shoes, and Margaret drew a cover. Tom was already asleep, and they tiptoed from the room.

Outside the door they paused.

"Does he do this very often?" Baynes asked softly.

"Whenever he has the slightest excuse," she said under her breath.

Baynes hesitated, looking down on her with some shyness. He was tall and thin, and in the dim light he looked young and tired. "You go back home as fast as you can," she whispered. "There'll be a lot for you to do tomorrow."

He still hesitated. "What'll I call you?" he inquired.

"Call me?" she repeated.

He went on. "I've always been just a kid to you and Edward—I'll have to call you something now."

"Are you glad?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered. Although he had seldom spoken to her in all the years he had known her, he liked her and felt a strange tingling sense of nearness to her—she was going to be his brother's wife!

"Call me Maggie," she suggested.

"But is that what Edward calls you?" he asked.

"Nobody calls me Maggie. It can be your special name for me," she replied.

He considered this uncertainly. "Will Edward mind?"

"I like him to call me Margaret," she replied. "It seems to suit him."

He had no notion of what she meant by this, but he accepted it. "All right—Maggie."

"And don't tell anybody about Tom," she said.

"I won't," he promised. "But Ed knows, of course."

"Does he?" She paused, then she said, "Sometime I'll tell you why he gets drunk."

"Is there a reason?" he asked in surprise.

"There's always a reason," she said decisively. "Now go home—do!"

He walked home through the cold December air, and let himself into the house. There was neither sound nor light and he stole upstairs to his own room, undressed, and crawled into his

cold bed, worrying lest tomorrow Tom could not help him out.

On the other side of the wall Edward lay motionless and awake. What did men think about the night before they were married? It depended, he supposed, upon what sort of men they were. He supposed that for some men it was a night of impatient waiting for physical fulfillment. He had heard of men who could not wait, and who went to a brothel. In the talk of boys together in college there had even been advice that this was a good thing to do, because it kept a man from being too urgent. A woman was always afraid on her wedding night—if she was a virgin, that is. He had heard such talk without seeming to listen, being shy and fastidious. Now he knew that he had listened, for here it all was in his mind. He had thought it filthy talk then and it seemed even more filthy now. He wanted fulfillment, of course—but not at all costs. He wanted the fulfillment of wholeness, but what that was he could not comprehend, except that it was more than physical.

Lying alone in his room for this last night of his solitary life, he was aware of a profound satisfaction that he, too, would go to his marriage a virgin. There would be nothing to tell Margaret tomorrow night—nothing at all. Had there been episodes in his past, he would have been wretched had he not told her. His fearful honesty would have compelled him. He had kissed a few girls—two, to be exact—but the memory of their faces, their lips, were now disgusting to him. He groaned and turned on his side. The folly of the young! Thank God it had carried him no further. That was because he had so early loved Margaret. He sighed, and her face swam out of the darkness. He would take every hour as it came, all the hours ahead, the days, the years. His mind ran down those years and he saw himself and Margaret—children, too, but he could not see their faces. There would be plenty of room in that big house. He supposed that he'd get as used to the Holcombe house as he was to this room. It would cease to be the Holcombe house, it would become his. The spigot of the bathroom leaked—but they were lucky to have a bathroom—most old houses didn't.

Mr. Holcombe was English and that was why. He must remember to fix the spigot. He fell asleep at last.

His wedding day was sunny—that he made sure of when he sprang out of bed. Sunshine and blue sky above snow! The gray sky had opened and a steady quiet rain at dusk had changed to snow during the night and the clouds had cleared. He stood at the open window for a moment, breathing in the crisp cold air, and his spirits soared. What had he been afraid of yesterday or any other day? This was the day of his heart's desire, the dream day of his life. Religion was the social custom of church going and the stereotyped prayers of his childhood long since left off, but at this moment he fell to his knees beside his bed and prayed speechlessly that God would help him to be a good man and good husband for his beloved. It was only for a moment and he was on his feet again, half ashamed. But the impulse had done him good. He did not often let himself act upon impulse.

Now, feeling unusually free, he prepared himself for his wedding day. There was plenty to do. He had slept later than his habit, and his mother had not called him. When he had eaten his breakfast he must go to the church for rehearsal, and by the time that was over, it would be noon. Margaret was to sleep for two hours this afternoon—that Mrs. Seaton had told him firmly—and he would go to the shop and work out those two hours as the easiest way to rid himself of them. Then it would be time to bathe and dress and see that the last things were packed into his new pigskin bag, which had been his wedding gift from his father and mother. "It's not your Christmas gift, mind," his mother had taken care to say.

So engrossed was he in his own day that he had not thought of what it would mean to his family, and he was surprised to see them all in the dining room waiting for breakfast with him. He saw when he opened the door that they were even in their second-best clothes. His father was reading the paper, his mother was

watering the plants on the window sill, Baynes was whistling the canary into a frenzy, and Louise stood watching. She was always happier when Baynes was at home. Seeing that plain somewhat patient young face, Edward felt a stab of remorse that he so often forgot his sister.

"Well, young man," his father said mildly. He looked over his spectacles.

"I didn't expect to see everybody," Edward said. He felt shy and awkward, hating to be the center of attention.

"It's the last morning," his mother said gently.

The last morning? This, which was all but the first morning for him, was for her the last. For one brief instant he had a dim perception of what time meant to a human life, and he could not answer her. His father answered for him. "Come now, Mother—don't gloom, my dear. We want him to be as happy as we've been, don't we?" He rose, snapped his newspaper together, and took his place at the head of the table.

"Great day in the morning," Baynes murmured.

They sat down and the family breakfast began in silence. Edward looked up and found Louise's eyes fixed on him. She looked away when his eyes met hers.

"Your dress all ready, Louzey?" he asked. The affectionate name of their childhood came unexpectedly from his tongue. She flushed and nodded.

"I didn't think she'd look well in that rose-colored taffeta but she does," his mother said.

"Good," he said heartily. He glanced at his brother. "I gave the ring to Tom, Baynes, but when the moment comes I want you to hand it to me. I'll show you this morning."

"I'll be there," Baynes said. Whether Tom could be was another matter.

The comfortable hearty breakfast went on. The canary fluttered its wings and sang furiously and sunshine fell across the table. The big baseburner in the hall warmed the room. His mother

had made muffins and opened a jar of strawberry jam, and Edward ate with appetite. The coffee was good, the cream thick, and the dish of scrambled eggs and bacon was what he liked best, upon a foundation of oatmeal.

"Well, my boy," his father said after a long silence. "I suppose you won't get down to the shop."

"I thought I'd come down for a while this afternoon," Edward replied.

"Don't have to! Let's see—you'll be away two weeks," his father went on.

"It'll be queer to think of you at the seashore," his mother said.

"Can you really go in swimming?" Louise asked in a dreamy voice.

"How queer—when we'll be having Christmas!"

"Hey," Edward cried out. "What about the Christmas tree?" He had forgotten it altogether.

"We'll decorate it tonight, after you've gone," his mother answered. "It'll give us something to do."

She had planned it all, he saw. He was touched that they would miss him, and wondered if it were disloyal to Margaret that he should feel now a pang of vague homesickness because he would not be here tonight to help decorate the tree. Lest his mother discern his heart he answered only Louise.

"Margaret says it'll be that warm." They were going south to New Orleans. It was Margaret's choice and he had been staggered by the distance and the cost.

"I'd like New Orleans well enough," he had replied to this, "but I'd rather go somewhere near enough so that my money will carry us there and back."

"Oh, hush," she had retorted to this. "It's my honeymoon as much as it's yours. I'll pay my half."

But he had refused such compromise. They were going, but only as he could pay for it. That is, they were going by day coach and they had rooms at a boarding house instead of a big hotel.

"I like little clean boarding houses," Margaret had said quickly.
"Big hotels are always stuffy."

She had no foolish pride.

"Margaret, behave yourself!" Mrs. Seaton implored. They were rehearsing in the church, decorated for Christmas, and Margaret was willful and teasing and so beautiful that none of them could keep their eyes off her. Edward was bemused with her. He wanted to shake her for her naughtiness and with difficulty he kept from kissing her. He caught Baynes looking at her with infatuation and that sobered him.

"Come," he said with sudden sternness. "Let's get it right."

She quieted at the sound of his voice and went through the ceremony, obeying Dr. Hart, the minister, with an airy demureness. Sandra was patient, Tom was nowhere to be seen, and Baynes had got the ring from him somehow and managed without dropping it.

"Whom God hath brought together let no man . . . et cetera," Dr. Hart finished hastily. "I think that is about all. The rest is familiar. Just pause a moment, Edward, before slipping on the ring. Give me two seconds to round off my phrases."

Baynes put out his hand for the ring.

"I'll keep it now," Edward said.

"Don't forget to give it to me, then," Baynes replied, slightly hurt that he was not trusted.

Dr. Hart listened to this, his eyes amused. He had christened these young people, had later received them into the church, and now they were taking their own part in the eternal pattern of birth and life and death. He bowed his head and walked softly away. Since the manse adjoined the church, he had kept on his carpet slippers and no one noticed his going.

If Edward had hoped for a moment with Margaret alone he did not get it. She squeezed his hand and gave him a long look from under her black lashes. Then she shook her head. "I have to

obey Mamma this last day," she said sweetly and followed her mother and Sandra out of the vestry door. He was left alone in the quiet church with Baynes.

"Seem queer?" Baynes asked.

"A bit," he said briefly. He looked at his watch. He wasn't going to talk over anything with a kid like Baynes. "Guess I'll go home and finish packing so that I can go along to the shop after dinner." Then he relented. "I daresay you'd better take the ring after all." He handed it to Baynes and was rewarded by the pleasure in his brother's young face.

"Thanks," Baynes said. "I'll see how Tom is. He was properly stewed last night. He get that way often?"

"I've only seen it a couple of times," Edward said.

They parted, glad to separate. They were still too young to show their fondness for each other or even to know how close they were as brothers. Baynes went along kicking pebbles out of his path and Edward walked home soberly. He wished that Margaret would not get such laughing fits. They were not pure merriment, of that he was sure. Some day he would tell her he did not like them.

When he reached home he went upstairs and found his mother bending over his suitcase.

"Now, Mother," he began warmly.

"I was only putting in a new toothbrush," she said defensively. "Your old one wasn't fit."

He had not thought of so small a thing, but he knew she was right. Would there be other things he had or ways of doing things that would not seem nice?

His mother sat down on the window seat. "I know your father hasn't said a thing to you, Edward. It's queer how men can't talk to each other. I do want to say this—it's so important to a woman that a man is—nice."

He could not answer, nor look at her face. He kept looking at her hands, thin and dry and strong, folded in her lap.

"I'll try to remember," he mumbled.

"Maybe you don't even know what I mean," she said.

"I think I do, Mother."

She sighed and suddenly the tears came to her eyes. "I do hope she'll make a good wife," she said.

"Good or not, I don't want any other," he replied gently.

"Well—" She rose, and going to him she kissed his cheek and he put his arm around her. "Thank you for everything—and I wish I'd been better here at home."

"You've always been a good boy," she replied. "I put your Christmas present in the bottom of your bag—and something for Margaret, too."

She held the embrace a moment too long and then withdrew. "Well, I guess, then—" She broke off, smiled through more tears, and went away.

He sat down where she had been sitting and stared out into the street. Nice? But Margaret might not think niceness was what she wanted. That he would have to find out. Nevertheless, vaguely alarmed by what his mother had said, he looked over his things and rejected a pair of pajamas that were patched and put his best ones on top. He cleaned his razor and washed his comb and brush and took out a new tie for tomorrow morning. New socks, new handkerchiefs, a clean shirt for every day.

The Chinese bells chimed through the house and he went downstairs to dinner, and without desire to eat. His excitement he masked carefully under an air of indifference and he was grateful that no one seemed to notice him. His mother was urging Louise to let her use the curling tongs on her hair and Baynes was abstracted. His father was silent.

"Coming down to the shop with me?" his father asked when the meal was over.

"Yes," he replied.

They put on their coats and hats and walked down the street together. "About that loan," his father began, "I don't suppose you could borrow a thousand yourself?"

Edward considered. "I'd have to talk it over with Margaret."

His father threw him a sharp look. "I'm not telling your mother about our house."

"Margaret and I have made a sort of bargain to be frank with each other," Edward replied.

"We all do at first," his father retorted. They walked for a block in silence, then his father straightened his shoulders. "Well, it's too much to ask on your wedding day," he said abruptly. They entered the shop and parted, his father to the office and he to the pressroom to examine a page of type for a temperance folder ordered by a woman's society in Boston. He studied the proof. "Strong drink destroys a man's soul," the headline announced. He reduced the size of the type and lessened the space between the lines. In one hour and forty minutes he would be standing before the minister, with Margaret at his side. In two hours they would be man and wife.

Edward was completely composed, this to his own astonishment. He went through the ceremony with tender gravity, thinking of Margaret and not himself. The church was full of the people they had both known all their lives, elderly men and women whom they had badgered in one way or another as children, who had been their teachers in school and Sunday school, who had sold them food and clothes and Christmas toys, who had invited them to parties and picnics. And there were the young married, watching with wise bright eyes, confident and approving. Children stared, awed by the mysticism of the ceremony, and girls and boys, too old to be children, watched with hearts beating for themselves when their time came. It was the accomplishment of his one dream, this hour set apart and perfect, the church warm and bright with holly and pine and the lighted lamps of evening streaming out through the windows to lie upon the snow. Organ music filled the shallow arches of the roof and Mrs. Sulley, the old doctor's wife, short and squat and grotesque with fat, poured out

a voice powerful and pure. Dr. Sulley had brought both of them into the world, but he was not here. Over in the next valley a farmer's wife was giving birth to a child.

"The voice that breathed o'er Eden," the strong sweet voice was gentle with tenderness.

And Margaret, who this morning had been willful with mischief, was grave and tall. She carried a little ivory prayerbook and no flowers, and her hair was a dark cloud under her lace veil. Sandra and Louise stood behind her like twin roses, and he was surprised to see that Louise was almost pretty. Her mother had curled her hair under the wide velvet hat, and her lips looked red.

He felt Margaret's shoulder against his, her arm touching his, the soft fullness of her white form against his thigh and knees. Her low voice was composed and sure and when he answered his own was unfaltering. Baynes was sweating but when the time came for the ring he handed it to Edward, hooked slightly over the tip of his little finger so that it would not drop.

"With this ring I thee wed."

His voice followed old Dr. Hart's slow steady tone, deep with tenderness. Margaret was looking at him, her blue eyes fathomless. His head swam a little and he held her hand tightly. Their voices repeating, answering, came in perfect rhythm. "Man and wife!" Out of the swirl of joy these words came as clear as bells. It was over. He turned and held his head high and with her hand inside his elbow, they walked down the holly-wreathed aisle. "What God hath joined, let no man put asunder—" No man, not even himself!

"There!" Margaret said.

She took off her hat and put it on the seat opposite.

"It wasn't too bad, was it?" he asked.

The train swerved around a hill and panted steadily on.

"Not for once," she said.

"Not for once only," he retorted.

She smiled at that and she put out her feet. "My shoes, too."

He knelt and took the shoes from her narrow silkshod feet. He held her right foot in his hand. "What a little foot," he murmured foolishly. His restrained blood began to beat. "But it's cold—right through your stocking!" He nursed her foot in both hands. Her instep was high and arched and her heel firm.

She curled her toes into his palm. "You couldn't do this if we were in the day coach, Ned."

He looked up. She was smiling down at him with such a look of tenderness and shyness that he felt half faint, and he managed to keep his head only enough to salvage his pride. At the very moment when they had stepped on the train, the platform crowded with people coming home for Christmas and shouting at the wedding party, Thomas Seaton had thrust an envelope into his coat pocket.

"This is my private wedding gift to you—as man to man," he had muttered.

The train had started immediately after they got on, and he saw a porter taking their bags.

"Wait!" he called.

"Look in your pocket, Ned," Margaret said.

He had looked in the envelope and had found tickets for the drawing room in the sleeping car. "Margaret, you've gone ahead of me again," he had said most reproachfully.

"Ned, I didn't," she answered. "He did it without my knowing it—until five minutes before we got on the train."

He could not be angry with her then and he could not be angry now. It would have been hard indeed to have sat under the staring eyes of a coach full of strangers. Still, there was something deep, somewhere, that would have to be settled between them. His wife must be content with what he could give her—she must forget her father and mother and turn to her husband—but this was not the time for argument between them. He pulled the pillow from the seat and put her feet upon it and covered them with the

steamer rug his mother had given them. Then he sat down beside her and drew her into his arms and kissed her.

All these months he had guarded himself, wary of his own heart. Now he held her long—his lips upon hers, and one by one the guards went down. His arms tightened about her and she yielded for a moment. Then he felt her struggle against him. First her hands pushed his shoulders, and then she tore her lips away, and he saw a look of strange inquiry in her eyes.

He released her. "I am too much for you," he said abruptly.

She busied herself with the flowers she wore on her breast. "I don't know yet," she said after a moment. "You see, it's not only you I don't know—it's myself, too."

He had begun to be hurt but with these words she healed.

"We won't rush," he said.

She considered this. "Still, we'll do what we like, shall we?"

Now it was he who considered. "What if one likes and the other doesn't?"

She laughed. "You don't know anything more than I do—I can see that."

"You don't mind?" His pride lifted his head again, on guard, ready to be struck down.

She flung her arms about him. "I think it's lovely. We're starting out absolutely equal. Ned, tell me the truth, have you ever been in love before?"

"No—no," he whispered, and leaning over her, he kissed her temple. He could feel a beating vein there, straight from her heart.

"Nor I!" she sighed with joy.

"Sure?" He lifted his head to look into her eyes.

"Nothing like this."

"But something?" he persisted.

"Just—searchings," she answered.

The quick darkness of December had fallen, and putting off the lights as long as the lines of hills could be seen, they watched the landscape darken. He sat in a dream of delight, his arm around

her, her head on his shoulder, until he heard her voice murmuring against his neck.

"Ned!"

"Yes?"

"Could you eat very much at the reception?"

"No—could you?"

"No—and I'm starved."

He reached for the light. The flying landscape disappeared and their room became a cozy cell.

"We'll eat here," he said.

"Oh, yes."

He pressed the button and when the porter had brought the menu, he gave himself to the frowning consideration of the best food for happiness. They studied the dishes together while the porter waited grinning, and then gave their order. Not until Edward was consuming duckling instead of the lamb chops he had ordered and ice cream instead of apple pie, did he realize that he was not eating his favorite foods and finding it all delicious.

"Only what you want," he murmured.

"How do I know what I want?" she asked.

"Then promise to stop me as soon as you know!"

"What if I want more?"

"Promise to tell me!"

"I don't know—if I can."

This interchange in the middle of the night made him sit up in bed and turn on the light. She lay against the pillow, the soft lace of her nightdress open on her bosom. It pleased him that she did not put up her hand to draw the lace together. Her eyes were shy but honest, and she did not hide them from him.

"You aren't afraid of me, Margaret?"

"Are you afraid of me?"

"A little."

"Why?"

"I don't want to offend you."

She lay thinking for a moment, her eyes still on his. "I might offend you," she said at last.

"Only by making me think—I'd done something you didn't like," he replied after a moment, and put out the light again.

They lay side by side, feeling their way toward one another, while the train swayed its way southward through the darkness. Nothing he had known of her in the past helped him now. He had first seen her as a little girl when he was twelve years old. She had been in school with him since they were in first grade and doubtless he had seen her before then. But when he was twelve and she eleven he had seen her one day with a sense of shock and individuality. Her black hair, curling about her face in small feathers, was in two braids tied with scarlet ribbons. Her cheeks were pink and her lips were red, and she had just won a Fourth of July race on the school grounds. He had been holding one end of the string when she flung herself against it. "Peggy's first!" her school-mates had yelled.

After that he had always seen her first, in the schoolroom in the morning, out in the yard at recess, in church on Sundays. With what pains he had maneuvered his place at the end of the pew so that he might see the back of her head and the occasional turn of her profile, two seats ahead! Yet he had not spoken to her alone for nearly three years after that, when he was fifteen.

Yet all the times they had talked together and walked together, had quarreled and parted to make up shyly again, none of it helped him now. She was new, a stranger, yet the one he loved with his whole being. He was torn between selfishness and love. All the healthy hunger of his young manhood, his unsatisfied, carefully hidden curiosities, the banked passions, the honest animal in him, rose up now. He had no aids to self-control except what he could muster for himself. Church and society had withdrawn. They had given their sanction. Within holy wedlock whatever he wanted was his.



Now it was only love that took command. He loved her so much that he wanted above all to please her. In his total ignorance he had the instinct from somewhere in his intelligence to know that union depended upon two, not one. There was so much about her that he did not know—nay, what did he know? He had no guide to the delicate mechanism of her body and her spirit. Even she could not help him. And he did not want her help, except in response and communication. Had she taken the lead in love, he would have been repelled. The way was his to make. She was the sleeping princess whom he must rouse, not to horror and shame, but to pure delight, so that they might live forever after in happiness.

He was frightened by the responsibility, and fear made him tender and slow. Fear and love mingled together, sharpened every sense and perception, and he was rewarded by her stillness and then by her yielding.

"It hurts me—but I love you."

"You are perfect."

"Ned, did anybody tell you anything?"

"No—did you know anything?"

"Nothing."

"Then we'll find the way ourselves."

"Yes."

They slept, lulled by the rhythm of the train, woke and slept again, until the day broke. He heard her voice at his ear, "Merry Christmas, Ned—Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas—let's open our presents, sleepy head."

He opened his eyes under the curtain of her hair over his face.

Christmas? He pulled her head down to his shoulder. "I'd forgotten."

Reticence being his nature, Edward had conceded the wisdom of a honeymoon as far as possible from home, as different as pos-

sible from the accustomed air. The soft warm atmosphere of New Orleans, the sunshine, the mists drifting in from the Gulf and melting away again, the laziness, the sense of holiday, the colors on the streets and houses, the glimpses of flowered inner courts and gardens, everything was new. Their boarding house was small but good. Their room was large and cool, and a balcony hung from the big window. Ironwork as delicate as lace shielded them and revealed to them the patio below, where bamboo and ferns surrounded a pool of clear water, still as the square of sky above them.

They lived as remote from daily life as though they were in a trance. He ate food that he had never tasted before, hotly seasoned, sour and sweet and peppered, fried shrimps and fish and ballooned potato chips, spiced soups and flowered ices. He had always been a sparing eater of plain foods but now he ate heartily, although with more prudence than Margaret did. Indeed he saw to his secret surprise that she could be something of a glutton, for the taste of something that she loved. He ate experimentally, knowing that he would always choose for his daily food the brown bread, the baked beans, the lean meat, of his habitual fare. But Margaret, her cheeks glowing and her eyes sapphire, cried that she could eat of such food forever.

"Why do we eat boiled potatoes and cabbage at home?" she inquired of him.

"I guess we like plain things," he replied.

"I don't!" she declared. "I like things that taste."

Her slender firm body was as hard as his own, defying fat, and she ate as she pleased, slept hours on end when the mood for sleep fell on her or stayed up half the night. All his careful habits were upset and put aside, and he let it be so, knowing that it could not last. He encouraged curiosities that he did not possess and followed her into old shops and churches smelling of mold and he bought for her strange flowers and an old French chair and an ancient prayerbook with a clasp studded with seed pearls and

they sat in a square and ate oranges and watched children of every color playing together.

"I didn't think you'd be like this, Ned," she exclaimed one day.

"Like what?" he asked.

"Fun!"

"Why did you marry me then?" he asked.

"Because—"

She walked beside him, both hands clasped over his arm, her head just below the level of his eyes, and he did not press her. He was secretly astonished at his own capacity for enjoyment. Here where they were unknown he felt no embarrassment at her love openly expressed before strangers. They were in a solitude of strangers, one among many couples in love. While the rest of the world worked and went to bed early and rose to work again, they lived the life of royal beings. Their room became a sort of home, and the sight of her clothes hanging beside his grew natural and was no longer a sight for wonder. When she had hung her frocks beside his sober gray second suit, he had made occasion to open the closet door during the day, that he might see again the intimacy. When she asked him what he did, he was ashamed of his softness.

"You must tell me," she insisted.

"I'm a fool, that's all," he had said.

"Ah, don't be ashamed of anything, Ned!"

"Well then," he opened the closet door. "Your frock there—against my things—"

She ran to the closet and nestled her cheek against his coat. "I'll tell you something."

"What?" His heart melted with love and went running through his veins like fire.

"When I told my mother I wasn't sure I wanted to marry you, she said, 'How do you feel when you see his coat hanging in the hall?' So one day when you were there talking to Father—re-

member?—I went into the hall, and I put my arms around your coat—like this, and I knew.”

He was speechless with the wonder of this and he took her in his arms.

In the midst of love and satisfaction he was ashamed to discover in himself, one day, small vague thoughts of business. He stifled these intruders and hid them from Margaret as though they were thoughts of other women. What then was his surprise when after another day of unalloyed joy and idleness she said suddenly, “Don’t hate me, Ned, but I have a hankering to get at our house!”

She was lying across the bed on her stomach, clad only in a chemise made of white clouds, and her hair was hanging over her shoulders. He still felt shy about staring at her. “I couldn’t hate you, Margaret. I wish you wouldn’t say such things.”

He was astonished that her courage was more than his. While he had hidden his thought from her, she had dared to speak out. This was intolerable and so he spoke out, too. “Matter of fact, I’ve been having an idea or two myself about the office.”

“Ned, you haven’t!”

It was an exclamation and accusation, and he was wounded. “Is that worse than your thinking about the house?”

“No but, Ned—you’re thinking wrong things now. I don’t mind your wanting to get back to the office, but aren’t you interested in the house?”

“Of course I am.”

“But you said office!”

He grew dogged. “The office is my job.”

“So is the house. We’re to do it together.”

“I doubt I’ll be much good at it.”

She shook her head until her hair flared. “If you aren’t interested in our home, I’ll live in a boarding house.”

Some sort of absurd quarrel was brewing between them and he stopped it firmly. “Margaret, let’s go home.”

She did not answer this. Thinking it over, idly, she wound her

dark hair about her throat and tucked in the ends. "How do I look in a high collar, Ned? Everybody will think we didn't have a good honeymoon if we come home early."

"I like your throat bare. What do we care what people think? We know what sort of a honeymoon we've had."

"Have you really liked it?" Her voice was foolishly wistful.

He sat down beside her. "What do you think?"

"I think you have, a little—about as I have. It's been perfect."

He lifted her into his arms. "You'd better think so. It's the only honeymoon you'll ever have."

She sighed. "Oh, Ned, I didn't really think you could be so heavenly nice!"

"I knew how nice you'd be—and you are."

He rocked her back and forth, his face in her neck, and she clung to him with both arms. Then she began to laugh silently.

"Ned!"

"Yes?"

"Know why I'm laughing?"

"Do you?"

"I've thought of something."

"Again?"

"Let's go home secretly and not tell anybody!"

He sat still, contemplating this thought. It would be entirely possible to live for a few days at least in the Holcombe house—in their house, he was trying to call it now—without anyone knowing it. They were not expected back for a week and the house was ready for them except for the last dusting and the hot meal. Mrs. Seaton had hired a maid for them, she had written them, Hattie, an Irish girl. It would be nice to have the house their own by right of possession before she came.

"I am greedy," Margaret said. "I want to begin living now—this minute."

"Isn't this living?" he asked.

"Holiday," she retorted. She lay in his arms, looking at him,

and he felt his head whirl. Her complete abandon was entrancing and at the same time it made him uneasy. What was the source of her childlike naturalness and what did it mean? He knew that there was no such relationship between his own father and mother. He knew that to this day his mother undressed in the dark, after his father was in bed. His father was irritated by it because she stumbled over furniture and Edward had heard him grumbling.

Margaret herself had made a quick end to any shyness. She had laughed when he wrapped himself in his brown bathrobe their first evening in the hotel. "Why do you want to put that heavy thing on?" she inquired.

"I'm a hairy sort of a beast," he had replied in an effort to appear casual. "Not beautiful—"

She had come over to him at this and had taken off the robe and looked at him from head to foot. "You have a good figure. Why hide it?" This she had said so dispassionately that he was immediately set at ease. Then her sapphire eyes had sparkled wickedly. "Especially from me!"

They had laughed upon that and he had hung the robe in the closet.

And yet, although he knew well enough that it was not lack of proper modesty, there was danger in her naturalness. What would he do if ever she displayed it to anyone except him? It was a delightful private trait, but could it be kept private? He reviewed in his memory possible occasions when she might have been tainted with what was called "being too free." He could remember nothing of the sort, but he had not been much in the Seaton house. He caught her looking at him curiously now and suddenly he felt ashamed of himself and buried his face in her hair. He doubted that he was good enough for her, even at his best. This doubt at least he determined to keep to himself.

The landscape was deep in snow when they drew up to their own door. They had left the train at Rockford, the station above

Chedbury, and then had spent an hour shopping for food. Margaret had bought a huge basket and into this their parcels were piled, while he went to find some sort of conveyance. When he came back he saw that she needed deliverance.

"You strangers around here?" the inquisitive grocer inquired.

"We're moving nearby," Margaret answered.

"Rockford?" the grocer persisted.

"Out in the country," Margaret said calmly.

Edward broke in. "There's a farmer going out our way. I was lucky enough to catch him at the livery stable."

They escaped the grocer and lugging their basket they climbed into the sleigh pulled by a couple of heavy farm horses. The farmer was taciturn and drove them speechlessly to the house. For his silence they were so grateful that Edward added a quarter to the two dollars of the agreed price, but the farmer shook his head, and still silent, he picked out the extra coin and returned it and drove on.

"How wonderful he is!" Margaret cried. "Oh, if everybody in the world were like that—except you and me!"

Edward reached for the key behind the shutter of a window, and fitted it into a frozen lock. It would not turn.

"Breathe into it," Margaret advised.

But his breath was not warm enough, and so she stooped and blew out a frosty gust of sweet warmth. Her breath was always sweet. It was one of his blessings. Together, laughing and blowing, they warmed the lock and the key turned and they stepped into the clean ice-cold house. A look of horror went over her face and she stopped on the threshold without closing the door.

"You didn't lift me over the doorstep!" she cried.

He seized her in his arms, carried her out, and brought her in again, setting her down before the hearth in the living room. He had learned to call it that from her, for in his father's house there was no such room. A parlor, a sitting room, neither was a living room.

"Sit down while I get our fire started," he commanded her.

"Do order me about, Ned, just for sentiment's sake," she replied and sat down.

He knelt on the hearth and put a match to the fire already laid. "As soon as this starts I shall go down cellar and get the furnace going," he said. "But you'll warm your little feet here."

"Light the kitchen range first," she urged. "I can't wait."

She could not keep from singing. Song was impossible to him, but it bubbled out of her. She could not sit still and forgetting his command, as she always did when she wished, she ran about the house. He lit the kitchen stove and downstairs in the cellar he could hear her feet, flying over the floor above his head. They paused at the stair and she called down, "I shan't go upstairs until you come with me!"

"Good girl!" he shouted back.

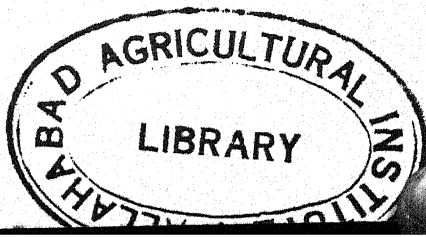
The furnace was laid ready, too, and he poured a little kerosene on the kindling and heard the roar of fire. This was the warmth of his house and for the first time he felt the house was his own. Then he frowned. There was no sieve for the ashes and there would be waste of coal. The thought of buying a sieve and even of using it gave him pleasure although it was a task that he had detested whenever he had been compelled to do it in his father's house. He washed his hands at the kitchen sink, saw that the fire was blazing in the living room, and then went into the hall where Margaret waited, her foot on the stair. She flung her arm about him and he put his about her and thus arm in arm they went up the broad stairs. Mr. Holcombe had not liked the narrow stairs of New England and he had built his hall spaciouly and the stairs wide, as they had been in his home in England.

"Bless him," Margaret said.

"Are you thinking about Mr. Holcombe, too?" Edward asked amazed.

"Weren't you?" she replied.

They walked the length of the upstairs hall to the room that was



to be their own. This was the room where he was to live his intimate life with her! His children would be conceived and born here. He would grow old here, and here, please God, he would die.

Death he had not thought of once since his marriage, and now it sprang at him monstrously. One of them must die first! It had not occurred to him that it would be so. But which? Could he live if it were she? And yet she must not be left alone. Then he put the thought away. Certainly he must not tell her what he was thinking. He tried quickly to think of something else, lest with her uncanny intuition she discern the cloud of death in his mind.

"The sun pours in," he murmured. Two wide windows opened to the south and beyond them the snow-laden hill rose round to the blue sky.

She turned suddenly and hid her face in his breast. "Don't leave me!" she whispered.

"But of course I shan't leave you," he protested.

"Let me die first," she begged.

"I promise," he said quietly.

He held her and then as suddenly she drew away from him.

"I must cook dinner!" she exclaimed and ran down the stair like thistledown, her skirts floating about her.

They were alone for three days, and during the whole time Edward worked in almost silent zeal and entire absorption. He went over the entire house from attic to cellar. While Margaret dusted and arranged closets and bureau drawers, and put wedding presents into their new places, he put up hooks, tightened hinges, adjusted doors, painted worn spots on floors and window sills, and hammered picture hooks. Beyond the windows the snow remained immovably deep, and he took his exercise in shoveling paths fiercely and thoroughly. He enjoyed this far more than New Orleans and faced the truth about himself that however much

he longed to enjoy what might be called pleasure he found his real delight in work. He tramped around the outside of the house, examining every shutter and frame and lock. There was a large porch on the back of the house and there were boards in the floor that had rotted and must be replaced. Hour by hour he made the house his own and his home and when the fourth night came he had forgotten that Mr. Holcombe had ever lived here. He built the fire in the living room as he had done each evening, and it was his fire and his hearth.

As though Margaret felt his possession she went upstairs after supper was ready and she put on a long-sleeved, long-skirted frock of dark blue velvet. He went to meet her and stood at the foot of the stairs, gazing at her as she came down. She did not evade his adoration and it did not make her shy, and this was another of her traits that he loved. His mother met praise with uneasy laughter and denial but Margaret smiled at him with full acceptance.

"I put this on to celebrate our finishing the house," she said. She stood on the last step and leaned upon his shoulders, and he put his hands about her slender waist and lifted her in his arms and carried her to the big leather chair by the hearth which had been in his room at Harvard, a gift from his father and mother one Christmas. Then he stood and looked around the rooms. Margaret had lit candles and lamps everywhere before she went upstairs, and room opened into room in a glow of light.

"We can live here always," Margaret said. "There's room to grow."

The measure of what he was to have depended now altogether upon himself and he was sure of himself, too. So far in his life, so good.

"Now I know you are really my wife," he said to her.

She smiled up at him, her hands clasped behind her head. "And haven't you known it until now?"

"Not to the bottom of me." He fell on his knees before her.

"I haven't forgotten my promise—to make our marriage my life. I'll not forget that as long as I live."

She took his face in her hands. "I hope I'm good enough for you," she cried softly and when he protested she closed his lips with her kiss.

They ate their supper; they spent the evening in happy wandering through their house; they sat by the fire until it died to coals. Then they locked the house and went to bed. He had not overcome the shyness of his body. He could not put into words the act of his passion. He did not want words. He wanted silence and feeling. But she wanted words and she made talk, laughing, half play, half teasing, as though she evaded the depths of his feeling. He had allowed this playfulness until now but suddenly tonight he made her keep silent.

"Don't talk, don't talk."

"But, Ned, you're so serious, darling! And this is joyful, isn't it?"

He did not answer her and she fell into silence, too, and gravely she accepted his love. When it was over he was astounded and then terrified because she began to cry, silently.

"I hurt you!" he exclaimed.

"No, you didn't," she sobbed.

"Then—why?"

"I don't know—I don't know—I feel different." She whose words came always so easily could tell him no more than that and he held her until she slept, distressed and yet exultant.

He was awakened the next morning by a voice in the lower hall and he got up and put on his bathrobe and went to the stairs. There he looked into the red and frightened face of Hattie, the maid.

"Oh, my soul and body!" she screamed. "I didn't know you was here!"

"We got home early," he explained.

"I didn't bring anything to eat with me," she cried.

"There's food in the storeroom," he told her. "I like oatmeal and scrambled eggs and my wife likes just eggs. Toast, of course, and coffee. We'll be down in half an hour."

Hattie changed everything in the house unconsciously but subtly. He and Margaret were now master and mistress as well as man and wife and they came downstairs decorously to sit down to a meal they had not prepared. Their talk must be fit for a servant to hear and he found himself making plans for the day in so dry a manner that Margaret's eyes grew wide. When Hattie had left the room she looked at him with reproach.

"Is that the way you are going to talk from now on?" she asked.

He pretended not to know what she meant. "Don't you think I ought to get to work and earn our living?"

"But you sound so stuffy," she complained.

"Perhaps work is stuffy," he rejoined.

She made a direct attack. "You know you were talking for Hattie!"

"I was trying to talk in spite of her," he retorted.

"The only way to be happy with servants is to forget they exist," she declared.

He ate in silence for a few minutes. Hattie had made the scrambled eggs today too hard. That would have to be changed sooner or later. Could anyone forget she existed? It would take practice.

Margaret talked on, oblivious of Hattie's comings and goings. "I don't like those curtains in the guest room, after all. What if I change them with the ones in the dressing room? Do you object to large cabbage roses, Ned? I love them—so hearty! Hattie, I don't like my toast so brown—make me another slice, there's a good girl! Or I wouldn't mind having them in my own boudoir, if you think they're too feminine for you—yes, that's better. I'll put them in my boudoir."

She had insisted on a dressing room for him and a boudoir for

herself, their bedroom being the big room between, and although he had thought it pretentious, yet he found he had liked dressing in privacy and much as he loved her, he did not mind missing the brief interval between her tumbling out of bed with her curls all flaring and then her appearance again, clothed and the curls smoothed. He disliked disorder, and he knew her well enough to know now that order was not the rhythm of her being as it was of his.

The meal drew to a close and with some sentiment he prepared to leave the house and go to work. But she was preoccupied with the changing of curtains and he thought her casual. When he put his arms about her, in the hall after carefully closing the dining-room door against Hattie, he inquired, "You won't mind being left alone all day?"

"I thought I'd just run home for a bit this morning," she told him.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" he asked a little hurt.

She opened her eyes at him again. "You aren't going to expect me to tell you every time I run home?"

"But this is home now," he reminded her.

"Yes, but you know what I mean. Don't tease!"

He would not allow himself to be jealous of her family. "Call me up at the office?"

"I might even come and see you at the office."

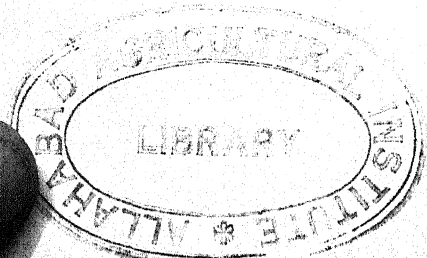
"Do, my darling!"

"We might have luncheon in Chedbury and come home together," she suggested.

"Can you eat that food?" he asked.

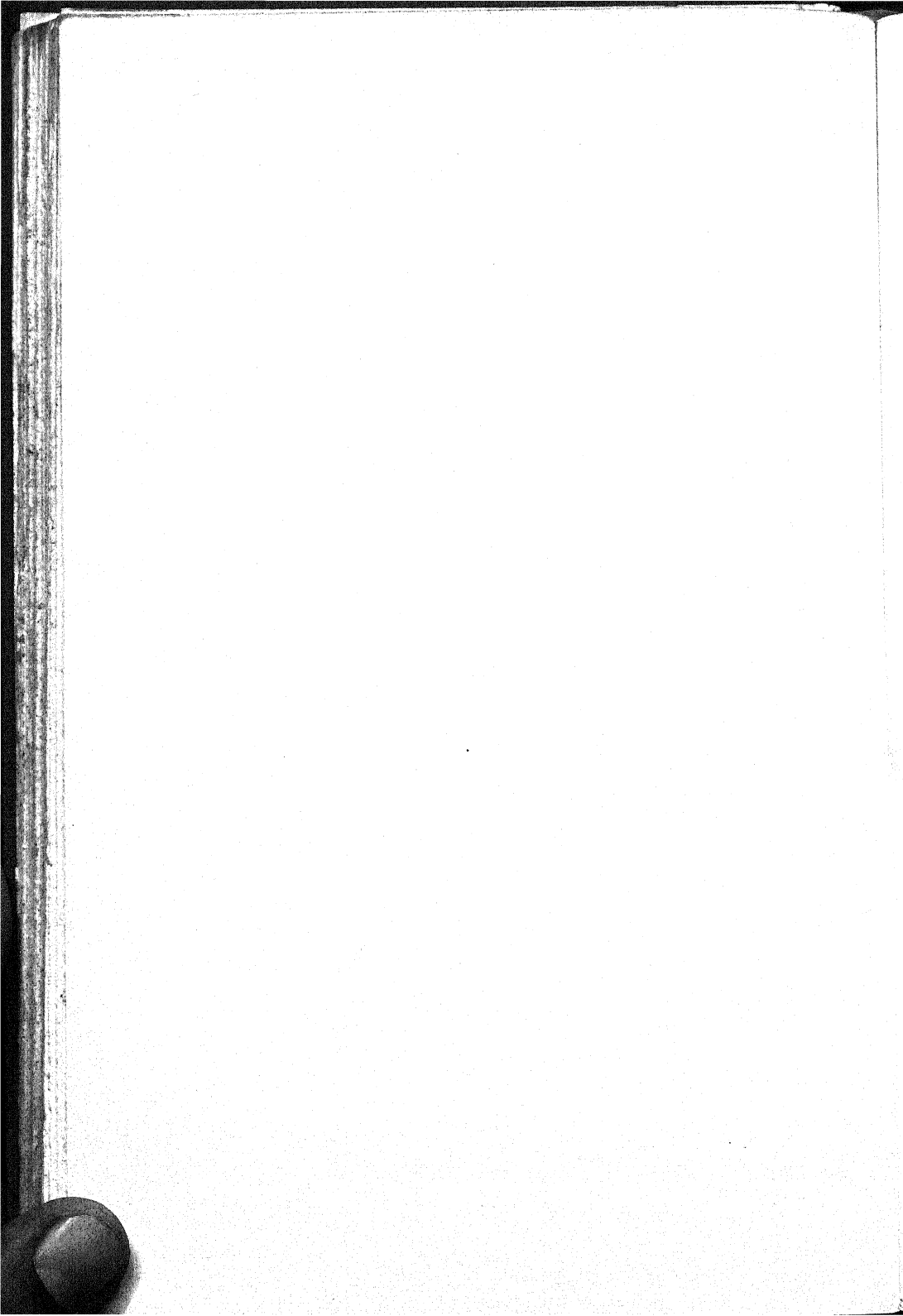
"Oh, once in a while," she said.

So their day shaped itself as they stood in each other's arms. He opened the door and looked at her and closed it again to kiss her once more and then ran resolutely out, stopping to wave from the gate, and seeing her face pressed against the window, he forced himself to walk on. Luckily there had been no more snow



during the night and the half mile to Chedbury would not be too difficult by means of walking in the ruts of farm wagons. Soon he would have to have a vehicle of some sort.

When three quarters of an hour later he sat at his desk, he knew his man's life had begun, at last.



II

EDWARD HASLATT was not one of those who rejoice to see the spring. There was something about winter that he liked. The contrast between the roughness of frozen snow and bitter cold and cruel winds sharpened his sense of combat and deepened the comfort of his house when he opened the front door and stepped into his warm wide hall. During the eleven years since he and Margaret had first begun to live in the house he had improved it until today it was as fine a home as could be found about Chedbury.

Chedbury was, outwardly, as it had always been, except that its ancient beauty had been made more perfect. The church had been recently painted, and since the war, every house about the green had been repaired and freshened with paint.

Actually Chedbury was engaged in a private war of its own. During the World War a manufacturer of steel products, lured by the promise of cheap labor, had tried to buy land at the southern end of the town for a factory. Thomas Seaton had risen from the pleasant lethargy of his life, had led an embattled township with such success that Jim Figaro, the ambitious young industrialist, had not been able to buy land nearer than two miles away. Even this was too near for Chedbury, which complained that the factory smoke spoiled the paint on the church when the wind blew from the wrong direction.

Meanwhile South Chedbury began to grow. Italians, Portuguese, and Canadians had begun to make a town of their own,

compounded of small flimsy bungalows. From these the townfolk of Chedbury separated themselves severely and old separations among themselves were forgotten as they banded together against the new. Haslatt now was as good as Seaton, for both alike were against South Chedbury.

Edward smiled wryly when his mother and Mrs. Seaton met at the Village Improvement Society, and yet why not? Margaret was a Seaton and he had built a small, respectable book business about the printing shop, which was now his own. The question today was whether he should not open a New York office. The center of the publishing business was there, as Baynes was always telling him. Writers, it seemed, one found only in the city. Well, he did not want to publish too many books, and he was cautious in the presence of writers.

He stepped out of his house on an early spring morning with his mind full of these problems. Margaret followed him out of the door, and he lingered beside her on the front porch. Two years ago they had torn down the long narrow porch and had put up this wide square one with thick white pillars. It had added dignity to the house and he liked it.

"It's still cold," Margaret said, shivering in her dark woolen frock. "Though it looked as warm as May from the living-room window! I do believe that's a daffodil."

She ran down the steps ahead of him, as lithe and swift as ever and stooping over a flowerbed, now a mass of short green leaves, she plucked a daffodil bud, tipped with yellow.

"It'll bloom quickly enough in the house," he said. "Next week this time they'll all be out."

He kissed her again, first glancing toward the gate. Margaret laughed. "You're still shy about kissing me, aren't you, poor darling!"

He denied this stoutly. "Not shy—it's just that I feel private about it."

Smiling, she thrust the daffodil bud into her fichu, reached up

and pulled him by the ears and kissed the underside of his chin.
"Good-by, Ned! Don't be late."

"Not tonight. Tomorrow night that fellow's bringing his book."

"Oh, dear," she murmured.

"He's coming on the late train, and if the book seems good, it might be sensible to be friendly, eh, Margaret?"

"Only if his fingernails are clean," she said firmly. "The last one was fearfully grimy and the book wasn't any good after all."

Edward laughed. "I'll ask him to hold out his hands."

He was suddenly grave. The words made him think of something. She caught his look and turned away, a shadow on her face.

"Don't be hard on Mary any more," he said in a low voice. "After all, she's only a little thing yet."

Margaret's full underlip tightened. "I can't bear bitten nails. It's disgusting. Besides, if she doesn't stop now she'll go on all her life."

"You'll turn the child against you, Margaret, and that'll be worse than bitten nails."

Her eyes filled with tears. "I don't care about myself."

"Yes, you do," he urged, "or if you don't, then I care about you. I can't bear the children to think you're scolding them."

"But I must scold them when they're naughty," she insisted. "Else who will teach them anything, Ned? You're away all day and when you come home you just want to pet them. It's I who have to be with them."

"If you are just your own self, dear, they'll learn," he urged.

"Ah, but they don't," she retorted.

He saw the tears glistening on her lashes and forbore. "Well, we won't start arguing on this beautiful day, my love. Go back into the house and get warm. If Mary frets you too much, we'll pack her off to boarding school. It's you I think of first."

She pulled a handkerchief from her white lace cuff, wiped her eyes, and smiled. "I'm not as wicked as you think. I read stories to Mary and I made little cakes yesterday that she likes."

"I know," he said fondly. "You're the best of mothers, at heart."

They had been walking slowly down the clean-swept path and now they were at the gate. He did not kiss her again. Instead he smiled and tipped his hat.

She leaned over the gate after he had closed it. "What time will you be home, Ned?"

"About six, I think," he called back. He waved as she turned, and hastened for the trolley. His eyes were tender when he caught it and found an empty seat.

She'd go back into the house and get Mary into her coat and hood and then, putting on the heather-brown coat that he'd bought for her when they were in England last year, she would walk with the child part way to the new grade-school building. Probably she would take the boy with her. It was strange to think that he was the father of three children, and that little Tom would start school next year. The baby, a girl, Sandy, was a year old. Three children were enough, he had decided. He had been careful that Margaret did not have children too quickly. Each time she had been in good health, rested and ready, and the children had been born strong and handsome. His eyes clouded again at the thought of Mary. What was wrong between Mary and Margaret? There might have been no drop of common blood in them. The child adored her mother and could not please her.

"She's a bit slow," Edward mused, "and Margaret is so flashing quick."

Yes, he had been careful of his wife. He tried always to think first of her and what she wanted instead of his own needs. He sighed, thinking of the years just ahead when Mary must grow and her mother must let her grow. Then he stopped thinking. Habit warned him that the next stop was his. He rose and marched down the aisle, tall, slender, swaying as the car curved and stopped.

"So long, Mr. Haslatt," the conductor said.

"So long, Bob," Edward answered and swung down the step, crossed the street, and went into his own shop. He still called it the shop, as his father had always done, although in the years since he had taken the responsibility for the business, he had steadily enlarged the plant, always with caution, and always against his father's will. Someday he would take over the whole building. He wanted even now to erase old Mather's name and make it Haslatt Sons, Printers and Publishers. Mather had died the year after he had started the publishing.

That first year of probation had been a heartbreaking one. Edward had dreamed of a successful book and a handsome profit. Instead he had only squeaked by. The book that had so fascinated him had made very little money, and he had defended it doggedly before old Mather as he lay on what was to be his deathbed.

"It isn't this one book that I bank on, Mr. Mather," he had said. "It's a first novel and a very good one, considering. The man who wrote this book can write a better one. Why, talking with some publishers in Boston they tell me it's always more than likely that you lose on the first book of any writer. And we've made a hundred and seventy-five dollars."

"Overhead, overhead," old Mather had growled.

"I counted in overhead," Edward had retorted.

Well, he had squeaked by, and the next year Tennant had given him the big book, the one that had made it known all over the world, he liked to think, that Mather and Haslatt were publishers as well as printers. On the strength of real profits he had ventured on eight more books, all of which were failures, so that his second year actually ended with a loss. Old Mather had died during the year, however, and although his father was terrified enough, he had agreed to go on with Edward for another year, and the printing business had held up. The next year he'd got the rights for two British books, and they had sold well, and by the third year Tennant had another big book, and he had insisted on larger offices. The fourth year he had lost Tennant to a New York firm which

had wiled him away with a huge advance. That had staggered them a bit until he had found Wellaby, who wrote New England historical romances, and these had carried them ever since. He was somewhat ashamed of the romances but the profits from them enabled him to publish books he could not possibly dare to accept otherwise.

He entered the combination freight and passenger elevator, nodded to the boy who ran it and stood silent while it carried him to the third floor. He arrived half an hour later than the employees and so he went up alone. The elevator came to a too sudden stop and he remonstrated mildly, "Now, Sam, I told you to have your mind on what you are doing."

"Yes sir, Mr. Haslatt," the boy said quickly.

He stepped out, knowing that he had said enough. They were all a little afraid of him and he considered this a good thing. He nodded to the telephone girl and passed his father's office. Then he went back and opened the door. His father was already at his desk, poring over a ledger.

"You're early, aren't you?" Edward asked.

"You're late," his father retorted, without looking up.

Edward smiled. "Some time I'm going to spend the night here. It's the only way I can get ahead of you."

"I can't sleep the way you do," his father replied. "Say, Edward, look at this."

He held a figure firmly with his finger and Edward looked over his shoulder. "You've overadvertised five hundred dollars on Wellaby!"

"Figures aren't all in yet," Edward said sharply. "There was a good sale at Christmas and scarcely any books came back in January."

"Hm, hmm," his father mumbled. "I can't see how it's fair business to take back books just because a bookshop can't sell 'em. You don't send back to Wellaby the books you can't sell."

Edward did not reply. He nodded to his father and went into his

own office and closed the door. Jane Hobbs, the secretary he shared with his father, had opened his morning's mail and on top of the letters he saw one from his brother Baynes, whom he had allowed reluctantly to go to New York for a week to bring back estimates of what an office there would cost. Baynes had taken Sandra with him. The New York office, Edward suspected, was more than half her idea.

He took up the letter and read it carefully. Sandra, Baynes said, was proving a great help with the office. Lewis Harrow, the young fellow he was sending to Edward to look over, was bringing a couple of manuscripts with him. They had located an inexpensive place, very small, really only a suite of three rooms, in a building in midtown, occupied by three other publishing firms. The address was a good one. That was Sandra, Edward thought grimly. He put down the letter. He would not be quick about taking on the extra overhead. If he took it on, it would be for only a year, and Baynes would have to bring in enough money to cover the costs. He had not dared to tell his father anything about it yet. He frowned slightly and read the rest of his letters, his mind still busy with Baynes.

This younger brother had complicated life by following in his elder brother's footsteps. Among all the many livelihoods that Baynes might have chosen, he would have only publishing. In printing he had not the slightest interest. He wanted only to make books, perhaps even to write them some day. And he had married Margaret's younger sister. Edward had been not a little disgusted when soon after his own marriage Baynes had confessed that he was in love with Sandra.

"You can't be seriously in love when you are only a freshman in college," he had said sternly, and then being too honest for his own comfort, he had admitted to himself that he had been in love with Margaret long before college.

"Sandra is somewhat frivolous," he had then said to Baynes.

Baynes had grinned and said nothing. He was still growing and

Edward saw with displeasure, which he recognized as unreasonable, that his younger brother would eventually be some inches taller than himself.

There had been no more conversation about Sandra, and Baynes had persisted in a desultory courtship that ended in betrothal in his senior year in college. Neither Edward nor Margaret put confidence in the marriage, for Sandra said quite frankly that she did not know whether she would like Baynes when he had finished growing up although now she thought him amusing. Yet in less than a year it had taken place. The young couple had moved at once to New York, where Baynes had worked in lowly positions in several publishing houses, and Sandra's luxuries had continued to be supplied by her father. When war was declared, Baynes, egged on by Sandra, had volunteered for a British regiment, and Sandra followed him to England. Four years of fighting on one front after another had left Baynes still unscathed, and apparently unchanged, except for an even taller frame and broadened shoulders, both of which Sandra approved. When Baynes came back a captain, he got out of uniform as quickly as possible and applied to Edward for a job, declaring that he and Sandra would live at the Seaton house. Neither of them wanted a house of their own and there was still no talk of children. In the last year, however, there had been a great deal of talk about New York. Edward had felt that Baynes coming into the business as a younger brother should learn the printing business from the bottom up, but Baynes persisted in remaining ignorant, declaring that he did not know one type from another. He took no interest in Edward's slowly growing typographical library. To Edward's horror he did not know Scotch type from Garamond and already he spent half his time in New York—hunting writers, he insisted.

"I don't know what to do with Baynes," Edward had confided gloomily to Margaret one winter's night after the children were in bed. He had that day received a letter from Baynes, in which this younger brother swore he had found a genius, whose name was

Lewis Harrow, and that upon the strength of this find the city office must be opened immediately and that Sandra was, therefore, looking for an apartment.

"What's the matter with Baynes?" Margaret had inquired sleepily. She had been sledding with the children in the afternoon and her cheeks were scarlet and her lashes drooping.

"He won't learn anything about printing, and still he wants to go into the business," Edward complained.

"Why don't you find out what he already knows?" Margaret asked. "Sandra says he's full of flair."

"Flair for what?" Edward demanded.

"Smelling out people who have books in them."

Edward had not replied to this. "You had better go to bed," he said to Margaret after a few minutes. "It's no good your pretending you aren't asleep."

She rose at that, smiling drowsily, her hair all wisps of curls, and then she had trailed out of the room, her long velvet skirt behind her.

Nevertheless it was on the strength of this possible flair that he had consented soon after that to take Baynes into the shop, and it was still in the hope of this flair that he was considering a New York office. Sooner or later his father would have to be told. Prudent and conservative, Edward was wise enough to know that these two qualities, though essential, were not enough. The publishing business demanded a stretch of the imagination that he was not sure he had. Baynes alone of course would be a menace to the business. Out of a possible hundred ideas that he produced, he would be lucky if five were practical. This Lewis Harrow might be a genius—and might not. Edward sighed, wondered if he ought to refuse his younger brother as assuredly he would have refused any other young man he had hired, and then decided he would risk his faith in the imponderable flair. He had recognized in himself this faith in a quality he saw but did not possess. It was what had made him want to marry Margaret, and it had kept him married to her

irrevocably all these years. He was in love with her immortal quality. But where had the immortal dust dropped upon the soul of Baynes, born of the same parents as himself? And assuredly Louise had none of it. Louise, still unmarried, was teaching school in Chedbury. She was one of the stones that he gave his children instead of bread, he sometimes thought grimly. Mary would have her next year in fifth grade, and he did not relish the idea. What did his pallid sister have to give his shy, easily agonized little daughter?

He pressed his cleanshaven lips together firmly, touched a bell, and without looking up when his secretary, Jane Hobbs, came in, he began to dictate.

"Dear Baynes: Yours of the eleventh inst. received. You can go ahead on the office provided the total outlay is not beyond the figures I gave you, including office equipment, etc. As to the author, please make no promises until I have sized him up. Also I must see completed ms. as usual. No advance, of course, until I have made up my mind. The time has come to tell Father about plans and I will do so today. I expect strong objections and I look to you to prove him wrong.

Your aff. Bro.,
Ed."

He dictated steadily for an hour, letters filled with figures, estimates, rejections, complaints, and then fingering the lobe of his ear and pursing his lips, he considered a plunge. Jane Hobbs waited. She was a thin-faced middle-aged woman and she waited, pencil poised. His weakness, as she knew for she was the custodian of his typographical library, was in buying new type.

"What's on your mind?" she now inquired.

He looked at her half slyly, the corners of his mouth twitching. "You know those Fell types?"

"I was looking at 'em yestiddy," she replied.

"We ought to have the Janson, to go with them."

"What's that?" she asked.

"Dutch seventeenth century." He hurried on under her disapproving look. "It's like the Garamond—easy to read, sharp, beautiful type. Yes, I'll have it—"

He dictated the letter brusquely. It had taken five years to make Jane realize he could do as he liked in the business. Five years he had endured her secret returns to his father to report what he was doing. Then one day he had locked the door of the office and standing against it he had told her that he would fire her if ever again she told his father anything. He would talk with his father when it was necessary—not she! And Jane, weeping hideously, had accepted his coming of age.

"You'll have to buy more cases," she said grimly, rising to leave the room.

"Order them," he commanded. "I've decided to bring the fonts for initials and small types out of the shop—have everything together so that I can pick what I want. The men leave things around."

When she was gone he got up and as usual made the rounds of the shop. He liked to be what he called a manufacturing printer. He was proud of his new power presses and his machine-made paper. Above anything he feared the accusation of being artistic. He wanted to be sound. And yet he knew his own weakness. He could not resist fine type and richly made paper. In the six months that he and Margaret had once spent in England and on the Continent, he had visited every old foundry he could find and he had brought back old type faces and handmade papers. The shop now was separated from the offices and the library and reception room by a thick double wall and double doors. He did not want the noise of the machines racking the air where he planned and wrote. But once through the double doors the noise was pleasant to him. He liked the smell of ink and the look of the grimed men watching so intently the pages they set and printed. It was a hobby of his that every man in the shop had to know something of what all other men did, so that each had a feeling for the whole and for himself



as a part of the works. He sternly rejected any notion of indispensability. If some man were ill or on vacation, he would not hire another to take his place. Someone in the shop had to know how to take up and he himself was not above spending a morning at type setting.

But what he loved best to see were the sheets of a book rolling off the press, then to be folded, gathered, stitched, and trimmed ready for the casing. The bindery was the newest and most modern part of the shop. He brought Margaret there sometimes to show her samples of cloth and to discuss color and design. He did not expect from her much interest in the business, but sometimes she showed deep and continuing interest in a manuscript and then she wanted to meet the writer and from then until she held the finished book in her hand, she wanted to follow every step. He enjoyed her presence, although it was sometimes troublesome, for she did not realize, or would not, that however exciting a book, it could only be one of many things that he must think about.

He paused beside a press this morning and watched the letters stamp themselves upon a heavy cream-colored paper. He had ordered Caslon type for this particular book, a little book it was, memoirs written by an old gentleman in Boston, and privately printed. Baynes was scornful about private printing. "You only get what other publishers turn down."

But Edward would not agree. "I don't look at it that way," he had replied in the steady somewhat monotonous voice that had become habitual to him these years. "There are books that people don't want put into the trade. They write them for friends or family. It's natural they want a hand in choosing the paper and the type and the binding. I don't see why they shouldn't."

So he had gone on printing small private books of poems and essays and memoirs, and sometimes he had printed sermons and plans for peace and he had never expressed to anyone, not even to Margaret, his secret pleasure in satisfying these individuals who longed to make permanent something of their lives. He motioned

to the elderly man who was running the press and the machine stayed.

"Is that ink a true black?" he asked. "I don't want it on the brownish side. I'd rather it had a touch of violet."

"That's what you said," the man replied, "and that's how I mixed it."

"It's all right," Edward said after a moment. "It dries blacker."

"It does," the man agreed.

The machine started again and the creamy paper ran its course. The old gentleman had written about his boyhood in Boston. He could just remember the sailing ships that went to China, and he had taken an hour of Edward's time to explain why he wanted his memories kept for his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren. "It gives meaning to one's life," he had said half diffidently, pulling at his white whiskers.

"It does indeed, Mr. Stallings," Edward had agreed. He wanted meaning in his own life, too.

They had decided on no color in the ornamentation, but there were to be fine initials at the head of each chapter, and black and white fleurons.

He moved on down the aisle. At the next press, in complete contrast, he was doing a banker's biography, set in Bodoni, with wide margins and on hard paper. He paused, admiring in silence the presswork. This press was run by a young man from South Chedbury, John Carosi, whom he had hired only the year before, a brilliant workman, uncertain of temper, and he had a suspicion that the fellow was secretly interested in setting up a union. Well, if he had such ideas he would have to go. A union shop, Edward had said firmly, he would not have.

He decided not to speak to the young pressman and he walked slowly down the central aisle and back to the offices. He had better talk with his father now, before they were both tired with the day's work. He did not like to lose his temper with his parents. Indeed he would not. They were both getting childish and needed care

and yet they resented any loss of authority. His father drew the same salary he always had, and this, too, was something that Edward would not think about. Now that Louise was off their hands and Baynes earning his own living Edward could not repress the dogged thought that surely he and Margaret and the growing children needed more than they had. Yet the business could not stand an increase in what he paid himself unless his father took less.

"I'll never suggest it, though," he had said to Margaret only last night.

"Of course not," she had agreed almost indifferently.

To money she was always indifferent. Where it came from, how much they had, whether they were secure, were questions which she never asked. She bought little for herself and wore her old clothes because she liked them, and yet she could commit an extravagance that left him breathless, as when she came home from New York one day wearing an old wrought-gold necklace.

"I'll need a couple of hundred dollars, Ned," she had told him cheerfully.

He had felt the crimson blood fly to his face. "I don't have it, Margaret," he had said simply.

The look of wonder on her face was like a blow. "Oh, I'm sorry." That was all she said. She took the necklace off at once.

His pride had risen at that and he had taken it from her and put it on again. "Keep it," he said. "I'll call it your birthday present."

He had borrowed the money next day from the bank, giving his note for three months. That had been eight years ago. Now, of course, he could easily have paid for the necklace.

He tapped on his father's door and walked in. The old man was leaning back in his chair, drowsing a little, his pencil still in his fingers. He opened his eyes and fumbled at his lips. "I was just adding up sales," he mumbled.

"Good," Edward said cheerfully. He sat down at the chair on the other side of the desk. His father and Baynes shared a desk. "There's something I want to talk over with you, Father. It's been

on my mind a good bit. You know I don't like talking until I see through a problem." With this he plunged into the heart of the matter. Better to get it over with!

"I won't say Baynes has influenced me," he concluded. "Yet in a way he has, too. Baynes has something to contribute to the business, Father—something that neither you nor I have—some sort of flair, I suppose! I know a good book when it's brought to me, and I can make a nice thing of type and binding and all that, but I can't nose out books and Baynes can. From asking about, I find that publishers need someone like that. It's lucky, maybe, that we have him in the family. He seems to have found someone already—fellow named Harrow."

He made his tone light to counteract the gathering heaviness of his father's ash-white brows. "Maybe you trust Baynes in New York," his father said, "but I don't—not with that wife of his. She's not like the one you got. Sandra's another piece of goods." He shook his head and his eyes were dark. "Ducks and drakes," he muttered. "Carryings on! Cocktail parties—that's the latest thing, I hear. All charged to expenses—"

"I'll see to that," Edward said firmly. He did not tell his father that he was beginning to understand that a small amount of getting about was perhaps a good thing in the book business. He called it getting about, and he was more than willing that Baynes should undertake it. He had attended a few such gatherings on his rare visits to New York and he had disliked them intensely. Yet it troubled him that he saw there the heads of firms much larger and more important than his own. They were solid men and he could not imagine they enjoyed any more than he did the strange drinks and fancy bits of bread and filling. Especially did he dislike the women writers. Thank God that his only woman author at present was an old lady of sixty, who wrote youthful little stories for children. He considered them trivial and yet they sold well and they made up into pretty books. She had paid for the first one herself as a present to her grandchildren and when it went into the fourth

edition, he offered to put the next one into the trade. But he liked to have it said that Haslatt's was a man's publishing house.

His father had sat frowning and ruminating. Now he suddenly banged the ledger shut. "I know very well you and Baynes run things to suit yourselves," he said bitterly. "I ought to be dead, too, like old Mather. The country belongs to the young these days. There's no respect left for the old, whatever sense they've got. It's a queer thing that a man spends his life getting a little wisdom together somehow and then it's not wanted. Young folk think they're born with all the wisdom."

Edward did not at once answer these too familiar remarks. He sat silent for a moment and suddenly he had his inspiration. "That's a nice thing for you to say, just when I was about to suggest something to see how you like it."

His father looked at him sidewise, his eyes frosty under his brows. "Well?" he drawled. "What's the next big idea?"

"What do you say to changing the name of the firm to Haslatt and Sons?" Edward asked.

His father stared at him. "Leave old Mather out?"

"He is out, isn't he?" Edward replied. "Every bit as much as Loomis—"

"Hm," his father said, "I'll have to think a bit."

"But why, Father?" Edward urged. "After all, it was only a printing shop when Mather was here. It's you and I who have built the book business, and now Baynes has come in."

"It's true that Mather didn't like the books," his father conceded.

"We are really making a little on them, Father," Edward went on. "Everybody says you can't make millions on books, but it's a steady respectable business—something more, too, I think, than just business."

"Business is all I want out of it," his father growled with a return to hostility.

"Well, it's not all I want out of anything," Edward said stoutly.

"I don't want to be just a businessman. I want some of the good things of life, too—some of the arts and some of the thoughts and some of the friends that making books brings me. I can't write books myself, I know, but I like to take what others write, if it's good, and give it a life of its own. That's important—a business if you like, but still it's something more. A writer would be helpless if he couldn't get his manuscript made into a book. Shakespeare would have been forgotten by now, if it hadn't been for some printer-publisher like us."

His father stared at him. "What's come over you?" he inquired. "I never heard you talk so fancy."

"Trying to convince you," Edward said, and grinned. "But it's what I think and feel, nevertheless."

They sat silent for a moment, as they often did. The sunshine from the narrow window fell across Mark Haslatt's head and turned his thick stiff white hair to snow. He had grown thin and dry in the years that had passed and something dour in his nature had become plain upon his wrinkled face. He hated to grow old and yet he had to grow old. There was no compensation for him in age. Sometimes he looked at his wife across the breakfast table, the children all gone and only the two of them left, and she looked so old that he was frightened. Ten years ago she had been heavy and sound, a kindly woman with a scolding tongue, which he had continually resented, and now she had grown into a thin mild silent old woman. Sometimes he thought her mind was not what it had been and this frightened him more than anything. Maybe his own mind wasn't what it had been. Nobody would tell him, of course. His two sons would go on, as smooth as cream, managing everything and telling him nothing. But he'd kept his hands on the accounts just the same. He wasn't too old yet to know when the figures were in the red.

"Then shall it be Haslatt and Sons, Father?" Edward asked.

He saw his father start, as though he had been dreaming. "Oh, I suppose it might as well be," he said half grumbling. "After all, it is Haslatt and Sons, you might say."

"Exactly," Edward said briskly and he got up. "It's time for your lunch, isn't it? I'll go home with you, if you don't think it'll upset Mother."

"It won't," his father said. He lifted himself up by the arms of his chair, found his hat and Edward held his coat. A few minutes later they were going down the elevator together. "Your mother don't look so good," his father was saying. "I wish you'd take the chance to see what you think."

"I will, Father," Edward promised.

They fell into silence again. A few acquaintances passed them and neither of them talked before outsiders. But silence was easy. Edward was realizing again, as he had begun to do in the last few years, that his father was an old man. There was something very pathetic about age. It fell upon a man like a disease, and it was incurable. He imagined his father's secret dismay as he found himself less able each year than he had been the year before, his strength fading, his mind less alive. And there was nothing to do! How cruel was God—if there was a God! Edward still went to church every Sunday with his family and they all sat together in the Haslatt pew. He continued to do this even though a profound doubt was invading his soul, a doubt that he steadily refused to face. He put it aside now and considered what practical means there might be of comforting his parents for the loneliness of old age. Consideration, of course, and the sparing of every hurt, but this was not enough. There ought to be pleasures in old age. Surely every period of life had its compensations, if one could find them.

People had to be taught how to find pleasure. Perhaps that was the true purpose of education—to help the individual discover the pleasure of being his age. So Edward mused, allowing his mind the liberty it naturally took, unless compelled to labor. And then he thought of his daughter Mary. Louise could never teach her anything about pleasure! A crime this, that his sister should be allowed teaching! Thank God that Margaret still laughed easily.

The noon sun was warm, and along the street children were

snatching a few minutes' play between school and their meal. The front door of the house was open and in the hall there was the smell of roast beef from the open kitchen door.

"Mother!" Mark Haslatt shouted. "Ed's here for dinner!" He turned to his son. "I'll bet she's in the kitchen, doing the work while the hired girl looks on. I can't get her to rest."

His mother came to the kitchen door untying her apron. Her wrinkled face cheered as she saw her son. "Why, this is real nice, Edward. Wait till I hang up my apron. What's the matter you've come home?"

He bent to kiss her dry cheek. "Nothing. Just thought I'd see how you are."

"Fine and dandy," she replied. "I do hope the beef's not too done. The girl likes it like leather. Want to wash up?"

"I'll go upstairs," Edward said.

He mounted the stairs to his old room. Everything was exactly as it always had been. Even the bed was made up, as though he were to sleep there tonight. It was like coming back into a warm outgrown shell, and something of his boyhood fell upon him again. He washed his hands at the old-fashioned stand, pouring the water from the ewer into the basin. The house had a bathroom, but his mother had kept the washstands in the bedrooms.

He went downstairs in a few minutes and his parents were waiting for him in their chairs and the girl was putting the roast on the table.

"Hello, Gladys," he said.

"Howdy, Mr. Haslatt," the girl answered. She was a farmer's daughter, pallid and freckled, and her sandy hair was in an elaborate braid. Ten years ago she would have sat at the table with the family but now she did not. The Haslatts had moved up in the town, and Mrs. Haslatt knew better. She was still president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and they met regularly here at the house once a month, important in the knowledge that their work had been successful. Edward never discussed Prohibi-

tion with his mother. Old Thomas Seaton had made him feel the folly of forbidding people what they seem determined to do, and the atmosphere of that house was wholly opposed to this one. Thomas Seaton drank as much as ever and fumed at the trouble of getting his liquor, and Tom Seaton had gone into the bootlegging business in a gentlemanly way. That is, he arranged for imports of Scotch whisky. Edward imagined that his mother knew all this, but she, too, did not mention it.

She watched the carving of the roast with anxious gravity. His father was not an expert carver, and she could not rest until she had made sure that the grain of the meat ran opposite to his knife. He had sharpened his knife carefully and he began to cut big thin slices and the red juice ran out. She sighed, relieved. "It's a lovely roast—I'm glad you came today, Edward. How's Margaret and the children?"

"All well," Edward said mildly. "Margaret picked her first daffodil bud today."

"Did she?" Mrs. Haslatt replied. Her mind was occupied now with the baked potatoes that Gladys was handing around. "Take the big one, Edward—you're looking thin."

"You're never satisfied with the way I look," he grumbled amiably. But he took the big potato, dripping with butter.

"Did you put that dressing on the greens like I told you?" Mrs. Haslatt inquired of Gladys.

"Oh, my soul and body," the girl groaned and setting the potatoes on the table she fled toward the kitchen.

"Her memory is no longer than her nose," Mrs. Haslatt remarked.

"Her nose is long enough," Mr. Haslatt said. "It's like her father's. I always say that old Babcock's nose is as long as from here to Jerusalem."

"I'm sure Gladys tells her family every single thing we do," Mrs. Haslatt said, sighing.

Edward smiled. "Well, you don't do anything very bad."

"Has little Tom lost that eye tooth yet?" Mrs. Haslatt demanded after they had eaten for a few minutes.

"He has, and I know it only because he expected a dime under his pillow and I forgot it," Edward confessed.

His father laughed. "I'll bet he didn't let up on you until he got it."

"He didn't," Edward said.

"That little Tom is a real smart boy," his mother exclaimed. "I know you don't like greens, Edward, but these are something new—broccoli, it's called. We get so tired of spinach, now that your father can't digest cabbage."

It was the desultory talk of the old days but it was easy and comfortable. The dining room was warm and the smell of the food whetted his appetite. He took two small feathery rolls and buttered them heavily. He liked being here alone sometimes with his father and mother. They had been kind parents to him and he had forgotten the ways that had irritated him when he was growing up. Now he simply felt that they were good and that they loved him, and that the walls of home were solid here. He wanted his children to feel the same way about his own house.

"Baynes wants to live in New York," his father said suddenly.

Mrs. Haslatt dropped her fork. "For goodness sake—what for?"

"He thinks we need a New York office—get new authors and so on," Edward said, taking another roll from the plate of hot ones that Gladys was passing.

Mrs. Haslatt waited until the girl had left the room. "Seems to me you've got as many books as you can manage a'ready. I couldn't read that last one, *The Singed Flower*—wasn't it?"

"It's beginning to sell, though," Edward said. *The Singed Flower* was a book from a writer he'd found in England, a man named Peter Pitt. He had not understood the book, either, but he had caught a vague feeling from it, as of music in the distance. Margaret had read it three times.

"I don't dare think of Baynes and Sandra in New York," his mother was saying. "Why, they'll spend money like water—the two of them hand in glove! I wish Baynes had a little more character with his wife. He's just putty. Sometimes it's real disgusting."

"I guess we're all putty when it comes to our women," Mark Haslatt said and smiled faintly.

Mrs. Haslatt took mild offense. "Now, Father, I don't know what call you have to say that. I've taken good care to keep my place in the house."

"Oh, well—it's only a joke."

"A mighty poor one!"

"Don't fight, you two," Edward said amiably. "It's a bad example to your children."

"There now, Mother," Mr. Haslatt exclaimed with feeble mischief. "Don't I tell you?"

"Oh, shut up, you—" Mrs. Haslatt said with heavy humor. "Is Tom Seaton acting as bad as ever?"

"I haven't seen him in a month," Edward replied. His wife's brother carried, in this house, the burden of his mother's disapproval. In spite of the double marriages, the two families had remained apart, meeting only at formal occasions. Edward had grown at home in the Seaton house, but Margaret would never be quite at home here. The reason for this, Edward was well aware, was that his mother had always to approve before she could welcome and she could not approve either of her sons' wives. She knew, although she would not acknowledge even to herself, that the Seaton family was higher socially in Chedbury than the Haslatts, but she maintained in her own mind the belief that the Haslatt family had a virtue in its soundness that could not be matched by any Seaton. There had never been a drunkard among the Haslatts and never a divorce. Moreover, the Haslatts were church-going and the Seaton were not—or at least only irregularly.

"I've told Baynes that we'll only try it for a year," Edward was

saying. "If he can bring in enough business to cover his own salary and the extra overhead, then I'll consider it further."

His father noticed the "I," instead of "we," and did not speak. It was only a sign, unconscious, that Edward thought of himself as the head of the whole business, but it thrust one more thorn into the older man's heart.

"Well, I can't take responsibility for it," he said under his breath. "What's the dessert, Mother?"

"Apple pie," she said promptly, "and I made it myself, for Gladys makes a crust an inch thick and like a piece of rubber. It's sinful to waste good food like that."

The pie came on, still hot, and when Mrs. Haslatt cut it the fragrance of sugar and cinnamon mingled with that of the apples.

"What a dinner!" Edward murmured. "I shan't be able to work for an hour."

"No more you shouldn't," his mother said robustly. Her dry cheeks had grown faintly red and she cut large slices of the pie and passed them proudly. "There's the cream in that luster jug—or would you rather have cheese?"

"I'll take cheese," Edward said, and helped himself to the square of yellow sharp cheese.

He was beginning to feel well fed and relaxed. Of course it would be folly to eat like this every day. His own luncheons were frugal affairs, and he dined at night. But he liked good food and knew that he did and he was rigorous with himself about his waistline. Only when he came home, as now, did he let himself eat as he had when he was a boy.

"I believe we're going to have a little boom in business," he said to his father. "Things look good. That's one reason why we can let Baynes have some head."

"The Republicans'll be in for a change," his father agreed.

"Poor old Wilson," Edward said.

"I don't feel sorry for him one bit," his mother protested. "He was getting us mixed up in everything—he's mixed himself, I'm sure. They say he's kind of lost his mind."

"I don't believe that," Edward replied. He did not tell his parents that he had voted steadfastly for Wilson each four years. The man was decades ahead of the nation, a man who saw over the mountains into the future. Old Thomas Seaton had finally convinced him of that. But it could never be explained to his parents. What change in him his marriage to Margaret had wrought! He smiled at his mother. "I can't eat another bite."

"You've eaten real good," she said fondly. "Now you don't have to go right away, do you? Father always takes a little snooze."

"So he should, but I mustn't—yet," Edward said. "Jane Hobbs will be counting the minutes that I'm late."

"Oh, that old maid," his mother said tolerantly. She regarded all unmarried women as freaks. Then she frowned slightly. "Edward, I wish Louise would get married."

"No one in the offing?" he inquired, folding his napkin and slipping it into his old silver ring.

"She's so closemouthed," his mother complained.

"I think she'll marry late," Edward said to comfort her. "Maybe someone older than herself."

"She ought to get married before she's thirty."

"Well, she has a few years to go."

He rose and leaned over her. "Thanks for a grand dinner. I shan't be able to eat tonight."

"I hope Margaret won't blame me for that," his mother said, bristling slightly.

"She never blames anybody for anything," he said carelessly. "Except Mary, maybe."

"She is hard on that child," his mother exclaimed. "I've noticed it, too—though to me Mary's the best child you have."

"Mothers and daughters," his father murmured. He had risen and was stretched out now on the old leather couch under the window.

"Oh, hush up," Mrs. Haslatt cried. "I was always nice to Louise, I'm sure."

"You never paid her the mind that you did the boys," Mr. Haslatt returned.

"What's the matter with you two?" Edward demanded. "I don't remember your arguing so much when I was young."

"We've got more time for it now," his father said. His eyes were closed but his lips twitched with secret laughter.

"Old men get so independent," his mother complained.

"It's our last chance," his father retorted.

"Oh, you old bum," his mother said with affection.

Edward laughed. "Well, if you're having a good time! See you later, Father."

He went into the hall and put on his hat and coat and glancing back into the dining room he saw his mother sipping her coffee. His father was beginning to snore softly. There was an air of warm content in the room, and he realized how much he loved his old parents. He went back to his office, his heart wrapped in tenderness, and wondered if some day his children would look at him when he was old and love him in the same deep amused fashion. So one generation held the other by the heart.

He went to his own home at the end of the day and the sense of permanence clung to him still. He in his time, and in his approaching prime, was fulfilling his place. The early spring evening was cold and he held the collar of his gray topcoat about his throat. He had left his muffler at home this morning, deceived by the soft spring sky, but now the large white clouds had been blown over the hills on the wings of a north wind. There might still be frost tonight if the wind went down. He walked against the wind toward his house and saw it looming solidly against its background of trees. It was square and the roof was low and the railed porches were white in the evening light. Ten years had deepened the shadows of the woods, and trees that he and Margaret had planted in their first spring together were saplings no longer. The elms leading to the house were beginning to make

a noble column. He walked between them up the brick-laid walk and one by one he saw the lights of his home begin to shine. That was Margaret. He knew her trick of going from room to room as soon as the sun had set, and turning on the lights. She did not like the twilight, and the children had learned from her to want the lights as soon as the land turned gray.

Eleven years and the house had grown to be as much a part of him as his own body. The thought of himself and Margaret living there together with their children sent his ambition soaring. He wanted everything for them. Other men could want amusement and travel and fame and money, but whatever he wanted was for them—for Margaret first, and then for the children. Comfort and beauty and richness he would work for that he might bestow all upon them.

He opened the door of the wide deep hall and let himself in and there was Margaret, lighting the last lamp.

"Giver of light," he murmured. Then his heart quickened. He caught a wild sweet gleam in her eye.

"Know why I love you?" she inquired in a matter-of-fact voice that did not deceive him.

"Anything new?" he asked, hanging up his coat in the closet under the stairs.

"Maybe I've never told you," she replied.

"Still hiding things from me, are you?" he retorted.

He put his right arm around her shoulders and tipped her head back with his left hand. "Well, why do you love me?" he inquired.

"Because never once in all these eleven years have you reminded me of electricity bills when I turn on the lights at night!"

"Is that all?" He pretended to be disappointed.

"But that's wonderful!" she exclaimed.

He kissed her lips again gently, tasting their warmth. They were soft and full. Strange how he could tell from the first touch of her lips!

He let her go, knowing now that she did not like to be held

too long. He had learned to let her go before she freed herself from him. Ah, what a deal he had learned about loving her! He had been hurt in the old days when they were first married because she twisted herself free so soon. He wanted everything to last forever. Now he knew that anything could become her cage, even his love. He turned to the stair and began to mount slowly to his room and she stood watching him.

"Want another reason why I love you?" she asked.

He paused and she came and laid her hands against the paneling of the stair and he looked down into her blue eyes. "Another reason?"

"One more. It's this—you never turn out the lights that I put on."

"Why should I?" he parried. Only some intuition he had not understood had taught him never to put out a light she had lit. He had often wanted to do it—longed to, in fact, within his prudent soul. It was folly to burn a dozen lights. Then his ceaseless determination to hide nothing from her forced him to tell her this. He leaned over the banisters, and looking down at her he said with half-shamed honesty, "Margaret—look here, I ought to tell you—I've always wanted to turn out the lights. It seemed extravagant to have the whole house lit."

She flung her laughter up at him like a bright bubble. "I know you've wanted to turn them out. But you never have! Sometimes I thought, really he will do it tonight—sometimes when you've been cross or we've had one of our fights. But you never did."

Her intensity warned him. He must not rush down to her and make love to her. These were her approaches. He must withdraw a little, let her pursue until she had committed herself. Oh, he had learned!

"Silly!" he said.

He went on up the stairs and she stood looking after him and he, knowing she was watching, went calmly on his way, his heart hammering against his breastbone.



In his room he washed and changed his clothes and then carefully chose a tie of wine red for his white shirt. She had put on her blue velvet and he had seen it when he came into the house. At first he had been stupid about noticing the small signs but now he had learned. Long ago when he had sworn to have no other love beside her, it had come to him that the variety all men craved could be found in Margaret, if he had the patience and the wit to woo her manifold self.

And yet the evening routine went on as usual. He heard his baby daughter's murmuring voice and going into the small room across the hall he found her in her crib, bathed and fed and ready for sleep. She was pulling the ears of a worn pink teddy bear and its nose was wet with her chewing. When she saw him the teddy bear dropped and she smiled widely, enchanted with him.

"Daddee," she murmured, in ecstasy. He picked her up gently and held her to him and kissed the softness of her fragrant fat neck.

"Ow," she said loudly and giggled. He understood that he needed a shave.

"Thanks for reminding me," he said conversationally and still holding her he pranced about the room noiselessly and was rewarded by ripples of laughter. So free was her laughter indeed that it ended in an attack of hiccoughs which she enjoyed with fresh amazement, and to quiet her he had to give her a drink of water which she then spat out on his clean shirt bosom.

"Here, young woman," he said with decision. He put her back in bed, kissed her on both cheeks, restored her teddy bear and pulled the blond curl on the top of her head. Then he went to his room and shaved and changed his shirt again.

By the time he was ready to go downstairs his son Tom was coming to look for him. And Mary opened the front door. He heard her first inquiry, "Is Daddy home yet, Mother?" Bless her for always making this her first question! She came running up the stairs and burst into his room. Tom was behind her. He looked

like old Thomas, a square-set red-headed fellow. Mary was dark. Edward had unknowingly bestowed upon her his own brown eyes and she had Margaret's curly dark hair. But she had none of the brave freedom of Margaret's carriage. She walked timidly, always a little unsure of welcome. It must be part of his job as father, he told himself, to take the shadow from her, so that she moved as one who walked in light. Strange that Margaret could not see what he meant when he tried to tell her!

He put out his arms first to his daughter, and then felt his son seize his arm and pull it away. "Here—ladies first," he said.

"Mary isn't a lady," Tom said scornfully. "She's on'y a girl."

"Lady to you, young man!"

Tom clung to his arm. "Daddy, kin I have a two wheeler? My tricycle's broken. And I'm too big. I could give it to Sandy when she's high enough."

"Oh, gosh, old man. I can't just promise without talking with Mother."

Mary had said not a word. He felt her clinging to him tightly, her arms about his waist, head against his breast.

"How are you, sweetheart?" he said. "Have a nice day?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Let's go down to dinner—"

He had won a point with Margaret about that. At the Seaton house the children never had dinner with the family. Supper came first for them and then there had been dinner for the parents and their guests.

"All very well for the English," Edward had said. "They don't want their children about, but I do." They had compromised and after their fifth birthdays the children came to dinner.

He took his place tonight at the head of the table and smiled across a pot of spring flowers at his wife. Hattie brought in small bowls of soup and set them down and went out again. The family meal had begun and it went on as usual and as he hoped it always would, as long as he lived. He listened to what the children had to

say and he made replies to please them and to correct them, and Margaret joined in with her usual vigor. She had heeded his words of the morning and she was tender of Mary, refraining, he saw, from correcting her for small mistakes in table manners. It was like any other evening and yet he was perfectly aware that it was one of their rare evenings, and that in spite of the presence of the children he and Margaret were alone with each other.

"I had dinner today with Father and Mother," he told her. "Roast beef and all that—I shan't be able to eat much tonight."

"Roast beef and what?" Tom asked with interest.

"Apple pie," he replied.

"We have chicken and stewed peaches," Margaret said.

Foolish little words and all the time he was aware of a slumberous softness in her eyes. Did the children feel something magic in the air? Had he ever as a child felt this glinting silvery cobweb being woven across the table between his parents? He had not been aware of it, but then perhaps in that house there had been no such weaving. A profound reticence lay between the generations in any decent house, and his was a decent house and so had been his father's. Here was something he had discovered; when Margaret was witty and her laughter sharp, then, though he laughed, he withdrew, aware of her declaration of solitude. But when she laid aside wit and did not make laughter, he could come near her and she would not repulse him. Oh, the misery of her repulse! He still was wary of it, even after years. For she, the woman, was essentially solitary and he was not, and this was what astonished him. She had welcomed their children, one by one, and she was a tender and physical mother, suckling them at her breast. And yet when the time came to wean them she was ruthless and eager to be cut off from them. He had not understood this when it had first happened with Mary and he had accused her of coldness to her child. Then before Tom was born he had occasion to observe a little dog, a female spaniel he had reared. She had given birth to pups and had nursed them day and night, never leaving

them until suddenly one day when they ran to suckle her, she had turned on them and had bitten them and they had gone yelping off, heartbroken. She was through with them and her breast was dry and she had to force them from her and recover herself.

He had not told Margaret of the parable, but he had pondered it, remembering always his vow that he would make his marriage the mainstream of his life. How large that promise has been he had not realized when he gave it, but he could not take it back. And he was aware, too, of her promise which she had given. He never heard her speak a wish to separate herself from him. Yet he knew at last that there were times when she could not bear him near her, even as she had not wanted the child at her breast any more.

At first he had been wounded to the very core of his being and in those early days so foolish as to accuse her at times of not loving him. She declared the accusation was folly and yet she could not explain why she did not want him near her. "Leave me alone," she had repeated. "Just leave me alone, will you, Ned?"

"But why, Margaret?"

"How do I know? Only don't touch me."

He had wished, once or twice, that he could confess his troubles to other men with wives, but his stubborn delicacy forbade it. Had he loved her less he might have spoken but he could not reveal her to another's eyes, either in the spirit or in the flesh. So he held back his anger, and once when she had shut the door against him he accepted his humiliation and determined to wait until she came to him. But her pride was equal to his. She did not come, and angry now at himself, he had approached her again, although only with words.

Indeed that it might be no more than words, he had chosen the living room one night after dinner. It was before their trip to England. Mary was then a baby and she had been put early to bed. He had been reading Tennant's second manuscript, he remembered, and Margaret was playing the piano quietly, all her music

subdued. He had sat watching her straight and graceful back, her cheek half turned toward him. Then he had spoken. "Margaret!"

At the sound of his voice, though he had made it gentle, she had started violently and her hands crashed the chord.

"Yes?" Her voice was cheerful enough.

"Shall we talk a little while?"

He was not prepared for the joy with which she turned to him at once. "Oh, Ned, will you?"

He had laid his manuscript on the table and she came and sat in the chair opposite him. "Margaret, if you wanted talk why haven't you said so?"

"But you've been a stone!" she cried softly.

He was aghast. "I? You've been miles away from me!"

She shook her head and gazed at him speechlessly, and drew her upper lip down between her teeth.

"You've changed since we've been married," he had accused her. "You used to say anything to me."

Still she did not speak.

"See?" he said, angry in spite of his determination against anger. "You don't help me now. What *is* the matter between us?"

The delicacy of her skin, white against her black hair, was one of her beauties and she had flushed deeply. "I can never get away from you," she had said, and to his horror he saw her begin to tremble, her hands quivering so that she clasped them tightly in her lap and her lips trembling.

She wanted to get away from him! He had waited for a moment until the first surge of hurt died down. Then he had said as quietly as he could, "But you should have told me if you wanted to go away. Would you like to go home for a visit? Hattie can do for me. Or would you like to go to Boston or New York—even England, for that matter?"

"We've always said we'd go to England together," she said.

The absurdity of their position, face to face, and yet struggling to find each other made him ashamed. "It would be easier if we

could forget that we're married," he said with sudden inspiration. "Let's imagine that we are as we were before."

She smiled, and he saw her whole body relax. She stopped trembling and then she laughed. "Ned, that's clever of you. Let's do more—let's pretend we're talking about two other people—not you and me—just a he and a she, somewhere, anywhere, anybody, just married and with a small quite nice baby, everything really wonderful, a lovely house, their bills paid—well, very nearly paid. There's my new suit, of course, and I know it was far too expensive but I had to have it for some reason or other—at the moment. I don't care about it now, and I wish I hadn't had it altered."

"It'll be paid for this month," he said, "and so let's call it paid for. All right. He and she—"

He entered into the fiction somewhat stiffly, feeling downright silly. It would have been easier just to speak straight, but perhaps it would not. Anyway, let it be as she wanted. "What about this woman, She?" he inquired. "Does she still love her husband or doesn't she? That's what he keeps asking himself. Maybe he overpersuaded her. After all, he is a stubborn fellow, this He, and he remembers that he insisted—somewhat—upon marrying her."

"Oh, but how can he think she doesn't love him?" Margaret cried. "She feels she is just beginning to know how to love him. That is—sometimes she feels that way."

"Not all the time?"

"She adores him a good deal of the time, she's getting proud of him because she sees he has a lot of brains, really—more than she thought. Her father said to her only the other day—'You've got something in that chap.' But there are times when she wants to be by herself."

"Because she hates him?" he asked.

"No," she replied gravely. "That's what she's beginning to see—not because she hates him but because she just wants sometimes to be alone and whole, complete in herself. She doesn't want to

share herself all the time. Most of the time she does want to, though."

He was looking at her who was his wife, his own, and he felt the rending of flesh. "He never wants to be alone, away from her," he told her.

She was trembling again a very little. "Oh, but that's because he's different."

"He's only human—too human, perhaps."

"It's not that—they're both human beings, Ned, and there they are the same."

"Then she's not afraid of him?"

"Oh, no—really she finds him even charming—as a human being!"

Now they were looking at each other steadily. He put the next question.

"Does she feel there's a part of him that is not human?"

"She—she doesn't like to say it's not human—"

"But it isn't?"

"Perhaps it's just—natural."

"Nature being different from human?"

"Yes."

Again the long pause and again his question first. "And she hasn't this nature?"

"Yes—yes—she has."

"Then—why does she draw away from him?"

She was thinking intensely and her dark narrow brows were drawn together over her honest eyes. "She doesn't know—but perhaps it's this. In him she feels the nature is something separate from him—always there, waiting."

"Waiting?"

"For a chance."

"A chance?"

She had ignored the question in his voice and hurried on as though she might not hold the words she wanted if she did not

keep her thought running in them. "In her, the nature is all mingled with everything. It's not separate—it doesn't wait—in fact, most of the time she doesn't know it's there. It is only when something she sees in him seems especially endearing—oh, sometimes when she sees his profile is really good, or that his shoulders are broad—or maybe when he is simply thinking and she sees his face in a new way—oh, I don't know—but anyway, then she feels—nature in her, too. But it doesn't separate itself from everything else in her and it isn't physical, at first. And it doesn't wait, you know, Ned. It has to be called to."

He had leaned toward her, and would not go near to touch her. "My dear, but how am I to know?"

She had shaken her head again, and he had been puzzled by that new and shy Margaret. They had talked about everything in the world except this He and this She, who were their secret selves.

"Could you make some small slight sign to me, darling? If you could—"

She shook her head.

"I'd promise not to hurry you," he said quietly. "You'd be the one to make the sign."

"I might be ashamed to."

"Ashamed—with me? Oh, no, Margaret!"

She had not moved her eyes from his face. Still leaning toward her and still careful not to touch her or go near her, as though a butterfly poised upon her knees that must not be frightened away, he had made his voice tender and grave. "Let's not talk any more. I think I understand what you've said. And I'll wait."

She moved quickly and the butterfly seemed to fly away, a thing of gold and blue. "But I don't want to feel you waiting all the time for me to—that's what puts me off, Ned!"

How clumsy he had been—the one wrong word! He shrugged his shoulders. "Then I shan't wait, my dear. After all, you forget I'm a busy man and there's plenty on my mind, beyond sleeping with my beautiful wife, pleasant as that is. I'll keep my mind on

other things, and I'll be grateful to you for what you freely give."

He had picked up his manuscript again and had begun to read it, trying to quell the beating of his heart. He was angered and hurt and proud and yet he knew that he loved her exactly the same. So they had sat for some fifteen minutes and then she had come to him and kissed the top of his head delicately.

"Good night, Ned—and thank you."

"Good night, dear. I'll be a little late tonight. I have this to finish."

She had gone away and he had put down the manuscript and had sat long, pondering deeply upon the mystery of marriage. It would have been easy to have his own will, as men did, but then she would escape him altogether. He could not live with her shell. He must have her whole, and that meant that he must have her willing. She could escape him, even when she lay in his arms. He had felt her spirit leave him, and there was only her body beside him and then though it was warm and fragrant, it was dead. Ah, that was where she had him—it was where woman always had man, if he truly loved her. And then there was no pleasure in her for him, not unless he was a clod, which he, Edward Haslatt, was not. There was some strange inner morality in this act of sex. It was moral only when he felt it right and good and he felt it right and good only when her spirit did not escape him. The sin was in the flesh—no, the sin was when flesh was without the spirit. If he were content with her flesh, then it was insult to her who was his love, and whom he loved wholly.

He began dimly to understand the meaning of love. Put to selfish use, it did not function. It had to be unselfish in order to satisfy even selfishly. Had he been of coarser fiber, he might have put woman aside, as a puzzle not to be seriously understood. But then had he been of coarser fiber, he would not now be married to Margaret. He was what he was, and they were inseparably married, unless he drove her spirit from her body. Then wandering and alone, it might never return to him or to his house. The

thought of this had put him into a cold terror, and he had sworn to himself a vow that he was never to break, a vow as solemn as his marriage vows, and indeed comprehended in them, as he had come at last to perceive. He would possess her whole or not at all.

He had kept his vow all these years since it was made and he kept it tonight. He had learned, however, that there was always a moment, which if he did not seize, he lost. The delicate manifestations that she made of her mood enchanted him, and his enchantment he had at first allowed to continue too long for her modesty. For if she perceived that she was leading, she instantly withdrew, and then he had lost her again. He could not woo her after she had withdrawn—it was too late. She evaded him. She gave that final swift shake of her head that he dreaded. She began to talk of other things or she took up a book. Positively he must meet her at some point. This point, he had discovered after a year or two of fumbling mistakes, was as soon as she knew that he had understood her manifestation. From the moment she saw that she had made clear to him her mood, then he must take the lead and she must follow. Nor must he postpone too long the consummation. His lead must follow her mood.

How many years it had taken him to learn these things! He had learned them slowly and stupidly, he often told himself. Yet he was compelled to learn them even for his own sake, for he was not a beast. He was above simple lust. Then, having learned, he was tender with her and attuned to her, and he was rewarded. In her content was his own fulfillment. The process had refined his soul while it had sharpened his senses. He and Margaret were so profoundly married, now at the end of eleven years, that he felt, with triumph, that he had made a success of his marriage. Had he been a different kind of man, a man without patience, without the wit to perceive that a man could not be satisfied with a woman unless she was satisfied with him, what loss to him! For he had not changed his whole character or improved his most common faults. He was still easily wounded and susceptible to jealousy, although

he thought he had learned to hide it from her. Jealousy she could not tolerate. Stubborn though he was, she had frightened him half beside himself in the second year of their marriage. One night Tom had come to dinner, bringing with him a young Irishman, a blue-eyed, black-haired fool of fellow, whose tongue was loose at both ends and laced with wit. Margaret had abandoned herself to laughter during dinner, and after dinner when Hattie brought in the coffee, she had patted the place beside her on the couch.

"Come here!" she had cried to Sean Mallory.

Edward had stood watching while the young Irishman sat down beside Margaret. And then she would not look at him, after he had glared at her, after her eyelashes had flickered at him. She had been gay and wild and Tom had encouraged her, and Sean Mallory, quick to perceive the young husband's silence, had yet found it impossible to resist the gay girl's voice, her sparkling provocative talk, her laughter.

When the two guests had gone silence fell as the door closed. Margaret sat on the couch where she had been sitting all evening, and she looked at him with hostility in her blue eyes. He had been confounded by the change in her. It was like seeing a landscape upon a sunny day gone suddenly gray under a cloud. The shock broke his control.

"I can stand anything," he had said to her between his teeth, "anything except what's physical."

She had looked at him honestly bewildered. "Physical?"

"That you asked him to come and sit down beside you, where I was going to sit—you motioned him with your hand—"

She rose, electric with anger. Her eyes gleamed, her hair quivered, her cheeks flamed. "Now that is enough," she said in a quiet and terrible voice. "You will make me despise you if you go on."

She had walked with dignity to the door and there she had turned. "What you say is an insult to me," she declared. "I will not endure it, do you hear me, Ned? If ever again you accuse me of being—physical—with a man I don't love, that day I will leave you."

She went upstairs and he heard her door close. He followed, after a miserable half hour in which he ostentatiously wound the clock and locked the doors and fed the cat and put out all the lights downstairs. When he tried the handle of her door it was locked. He spent a sleepless night, telling himself that he was right to have spoken and that innocent though she was, how was the Irishman to know that she was innocent? How could any man think her innocent when she was so beautiful?

He rose the next morning still angry and cold and she did not come down to breakfast. When he went in to her room to kiss her, her lips were lifeless and her eyes dark. She was unrepentant and he knew her well enough already to know that she would never repent of anything she had said or done and that she did not repent now. Very well, neither would he repent. He had gone away to the day's business, cold and hurt, and when he came home he was very tired. He found her quiet and usual and they had never spoken again of the matter.

But she had not forgotten it. He knew because years later, only last year, indeed, when Sean Mallory having become a poet of almost first water, he had mentioned casually that Haslatt and Mather had a chance to bid for his new book, Margaret had said nothing. She was arranging roses in a bowl on a small table under the wide living-room window and she had continued to choose one flower and then another. He had let the bid go by and Livingstone Hall had published *Fire in the Night*. He had brought home a copy of the book and had put it on the library table. When she saw it she had taken it and thrown it into the wastepaper basket. He had reproved her.

"Margaret, what folly—a new book, with good reviews!" He stooped to pick it out of the basket again.

"Don't put it on the table," she had cried at him.

He had refused to yield to her. "I'll take it back to the office and put it on my own shelves," he had said with dignity.

Afterward he remembered that long ago she had told him she

liked to speak out what she felt. "I don't want to have to stop and think whether something is going to hurt your feelings—" That was what she had once said. He had a vague sense that nevertheless she had learned to stop and think about his feelings, and that she no longer spoke out. But he, too, had learned if not to stop feeling yet to stop showing what he felt. In spite of their dreams, their marriage had shaped itself out of what they were. Their faults had made it, as well as their virtues. Well, it was good. He still could not imagine himself loving any woman except Margaret.

A telegram from Baynes the next morning announced the certainty of Lewis Harrow's arrival, and in the late afternoon Edward went to meet the train that was bringing, he hoped, the new author. This morning it seemed settled that the firm was to be Haslatt and Sons and he had called up a sign painter. In the afternoon he and his father had chosen the lettering Haslatt and Sons, Publishers and Printers. His father had actually been excited and Edward was calm, in consequence, though in spite of new pride. Now he wished the sign could be ready for tomorrow morning when Lewis Harrow could see it. He smiled, half ashamed at his impatience.

The train slowed to a stop at the Chedbury station. It was a local running out from Boston, and since Chedbury was next to the last station, few people were aboard. It was easy to discover a thickset young man who wore no hat and a shabby topcoat. He stood looking left and right, and Edward drew near. "Mr. Harrow?"

"Lewis Harrow," the young man said.

His intense eyes did not light under half-lowered lids nor did he smile. He wore a young dark mustache and he carried a worn bag.

"I am Edward Haslatt."

They shook hands and the young man began to speak in an

uneven staccato. "Good of you to come and meet me—yourself, I mean."

"Chedbury is a small place and I can walk here to this station quite easily," Edward replied. "I am glad you can spend the night. The trolley is only just around the corner."

They walked away together, the young man with a slight limp, and at the car Edward involuntarily lifted him slightly by the arm.

"Thanks," the young man said. "I got a potshot in the leg in the war."

"Sorry to hear that," Edward said.

"It's nothing—now."

They sat in silence for a moment and then Edward began to talk, diffidently. He was still shy before his authors, still, he feared, more printer than publisher. Then he perceived that Lewis Harrow was even more diffident than himself, and he laid hold of his pride and began to speak with determination. "I hope you won't be impatient with me if I take several days, or more, in reading your manuscript. I read slowly—and perhaps make up my mind slowly, too."

"I don't mind," Lewis Harrow said indifferently. He was gazing out the window. "It's still beautiful country. I was afraid it had changed."

"It's nice," Edward admitted. "Have you been here before?"

"Yes," Harrow said. "But long ago."

Edward looked out on the familiar landscape with complacent pleasure. Most of the time he forgot it, but when someone approved it, he remembered that it was fine and his own. When he and Margaret were first married he had honestly made great effort to see as quickly as she did the beauty in land and sky, but to his confusion she had soon detected his effort and one day she had said plainly, though with good nature, "Don't pretend, will you, Ned! You needn't care about the sunset."

"Well, I do," he had retorted. "I can see it's beautiful as well as you, but I can't cry out over it."



"How does it make you feel?" she had asked curiously.

"I'm pleased my world contains it," he had answered after some reflection.

"That's well put," she had said as though surprised. "Perhaps it says more than you know."

"Perhaps it does," he had agreed.

Afterward it occurred to him that she lived in every moment entire as it came, but he lived each moment as it was related to the past and the future. Thus he did not see the sunset as only a splendid sight, but he saw it in its place in the landscape of his home.

"You have a family?" Lewis Harrow was asking.

"A son and two daughters," Edward replied, "all small, yet—the youngest a baby."

"I like children," Harrow went on. "I hope yours will like me."

"You'll find Mary shy," Edward replied. As always his heart flew to protect this eldest child. "The others are ordinary enough—though their mother would reproach me for putting it that way. One can't say yet, as a matter of fact, what the baby is. I'm fond enough of my son, but I can't see signs that he'll set the world afire."

Harrow laughed. "A practical man, though a father!"

Edward narrowed his eyes in a small smile. "I hope so," he said dryly. "Here's our stop."

They got out at the corner road and walked the brief distance to the house. Edward said nothing, wanting to catch undiluted by irrelevant talk the stranger's first glimpse of the house. He paused cunningly just before the road turned. "Just around the bend you'll see where we live," he said carelessly. They made the turn and Harrow stopped to exclaim in honest admiration, "What a house!"

"It was built by an Englishman, years ago," Edward explained, taking care to be casual. "His wife died and he went back to England just about the time we were married. It was too big for us

then, of course, but—well, we wanted it. My wife was used to space and I wanted to give her what she'd had."

"Is that she?" Harrow asked. They were walking on again.

"Yes." They could see Margaret quite plainly now. She was cutting a few daffodils.

"She looks young," Harrow said.

"A year younger than I," Edward said.

"You're not old," Harrow said, smiling.

"Only older than you," Edward said, returning the smile.

They became aware that they were talking trivially and fell silent. A moment later they were at the gate and there stood Margaret in her blue wool dress, her hands full of the yellow daffodils. Her black hair curled about her face and her eyes in the light of the sunset were a startling blue. Edward felt the old sting of physical jealousy and his palms tingled. Why did she have to stand there looking as though she had suddenly come to life?

"This is Lewis Harrow," he said abruptly. "Harrow, this is my wife."

Margaret put out her hand and the young man took it. "I hope you don't mind my saying you're beautiful."

Edward, surprised by this boldness, stared with displeasure at his guest, and saw for the first time how strange was the color of his eyes, a yellowish hazel. But before he could speak, Margaret said frankly, "I don't mind a bit. Do come in, both of you. Sandy's calling for you, Ned."

The door of the house flew open and Mary darted out. "Oh, Dad!" she cried. "I thought you'd never come." She flung her arms about his waist, a brown-skinned, brown-eyed child whose hair was too long and dark for the small anxious face.

"I told you I had to meet Mr. Harrow," Edward said, hugging her.

"I told her, too," Margaret said, "but she frets about everything."

"Does she!" Harrow said half playfully. "How well I understand that! I always fret."

"Do you?" Mary breathed. "It's awful, isn't it?"

"Really awful!" Harrow agreed.

He seemed to have forgotten Margaret and Edward forgave him on the instant. So seldom did anybody see his plain little daughter.

"What do you fret about?" Mary asked.

"Well, whether your father will like my book," Harrow said mischievously.

"Father!" Mary cried. "You will like his book, won't you?"

"Mary, please go in and have your supper," Margaret said suddenly.

"Isn't she eating with us?" Edward asked.

His eyes met Margaret's. "She and Tom are having their supper early tonight," Margaret said.

The evening passed. At each stage Edward watched Harrow not only with his own eyes but through Margaret's delaying, fluctuating feeling toward the young man. Thus he knew that she was first horrified at Harrow's table manners. He buttered his bread slice whole and ate it so. He gnawed the meat from his lamb chop and wiped his greasy hands shamelessly on his napkin. Whatever he did was unconscious. Obviously he had never been taught manners, nor had he observed them. This physical coarseness was balanced by a delicacy in feeling and perception strange and quick. He lounged on the couch after dinner and shook his head at coffee. "Keeps me awake," he declared, "and sleep is important to me. I want my brain crystal in the morning." But an hour later he divined restlessness in Margaret and he smiled at her boldly.

"You feel you've seen me before, don't you?"

"I do," she replied, "how did you know?"

"I feel you wondering."

"Nonsense!"

"Of course I do," he insisted. "It's my business to feel what people are thinking. Well, you have seen me before."

His confident smile was not attractive but it was compelling.

"Where?" Edward asked with caution.

Harrow gave a loud laugh. "Right here in Chedbury!"

"Wait," Margaret said. "Let me think—"

They waited, their eyes on her vivid thinking face.

"The only thing I can see is our old laundress. There's something about you—"

"There is. I'm her son."

"But her name was Hinkle."

Lewis Harrow interrupted her. "Impossible name for a novelist! As soon as Mother died I changed it. I'm Harrow now, legally."

"You weren't the boy who used to lug in the baskets for her?" she asked.

"I was and am," Harrow said without embarrassment.

"Your face was always dirty."

"Still is, a good deal of the time."

"But how old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

Edward sat silent. The bright demand in Margaret's voice, the directness of her curiosity, had drawn a fearless response from the young man. He had seen this happen again and again between Margaret and some other human being. She was irresistible when she wanted to be—and when the other person was strong enough for it.

Lewis Harrow was strong and he felt no need for self-defense. He turned now to Edward. "The novel I've got for you tonight is about war. I was in it, of course. I have to get it out of my system. But I've already begun another."

"That's good news," Edward said quietly. "It's what a publisher wants to hear—that there's always another."

It was his turn now, and he took it, and Margaret sat by, listening, her eyes intense and her cheeks flushed, while they talked of the writing of books.

"What do you think of him?" This Edward asked her when long past midnight they were getting ready for bed.

"It depends on what he's doing," she replied. She took off the wrought-gold necklace and the earrings which a few years ago he had bought to match it. "When he's eating he's an animal. Maybe he's an animal anyway. But when he talks he makes me think of Beethoven."

"The two aren't incompatible," Edward murmured. He felt exhausted. There was some force in Harrow that burned the oxygen out of the air. A consuming sort of fellow—he didn't want to be with him too much! There was that manuscript lying on the table in the small study that adjoined the bedroom. He did not intend to go near it tonight. He lay down in his bed a few minutes later, and felt the sheets cool and grateful to his outstretched legs. Margaret was already in her bed, and before he put out the light he took his final look at her through the open door between their rooms. Five years ago they had decided on separate rooms. She lay as always high on two pillows, her soft black hair outspread. She wore a long-sleeved nightgown and there were frills of lace over her clasped hands. Their eyes met and smiled.

"I'd hate to be married to anybody except you," she said sweetly.

"Thank you, my dear," he replied.

They had already kissed and so he put out the light. He heard the small sigh she gave before she slept and then there was silence. She was exhausted, too.

He lay for perhaps an hour, waiting for sleep. He was not a sound sleeper even at the end of his usual days, and tonight he felt his awareness in every nerve and vein. Thus though his heart beat steadily and slowly he could count the pulsation of his blood as it flowed through his body. His hearing sharpened and magnified the cracks of beams above his head, the scrape of a shutter loosened against the outside wall of the house, the slow rise of the night wind. Margaret's breathing, soft and not quite steady, dis-

turbed the rhythm of his own, and involuntarily he tried to keep in tune with her. So for two hours he lay tortured by his wakefulness, troubled by nothing clearly enough to absorb his mind, and yet all the minor troubles of his days flitted darkly across his brain—Margaret's injustice to his dear little Mary, the young man in his printing shop, the labor union that threatened the peace of his work, his father's increasing weakness, his own need for more money and the impossibility of speaking of it, Baynes and the New York office, Baynes and Sandra, this fellow Harrow. He doubted his own ability to handle Harrow. Suppose the fellow turned out to be something stupendous, a really great writer, had he, Edward Haslatt, the skill, the knowledge to shape the notable career of a genius?

Upon this he thought of the manuscript lying on his table and he rose noiselessly and put on the woolen bathrobe and the slippers that were at the foot of his bed. Margaret slept on, and still silent he stole across the room and opened the door into his study.

When he had finished reading the manuscript the dawn was glimmering in the sky. He was shivering cold and his eyelids burned and he felt sick with weariness. His hands as he turned the last page into its place were trembling. It was more than fatigue. It was wonder and disgust and admiration and terror. He had found at last a man who could write and was not afraid of God or man.

"I've got to be strong enough for him." So thinking, Edward crawled into his cold bed and fell asleep.

Six months later on an evening in late spring, he was still not sure that he was strong enough. The whole town of Chedbury had gathered in the courthouse to hear Lewis Harrow talk. His fame had overwhelmed them irresistibly. The swift and staggering success of his book had astonished and irritated them. The motive of his novel had been to make a vast joke of war. His hero was a young officer who early had seen the monstrosity of urging

his men to sacrifice life, their best and most essential possession, for any cause whatever. In the end he had himself to choose between sensible escape to save his own life, or death on the battlefield to maintain illusion for men dependent upon him. Chedbury would have forgiven Lewis Harrow had his hero chosen death. Instead the heady young officer had chosen to surrender to his own men, with apology, a swaggering smile, court-martial and guns facing him as he stood back to a wall.

So unorthodox a bravery had confounded the sober people of Chedbury. Harrow had brought them fame but its cause was questionable. Reluctantly, after months of debate, they had decided to give him belated acknowledgment by inviting him to speak to them, and pride had struggled with curiosity in coming to hear him.

Mrs. Seaton said what many others felt. "It's a pity that it had to be only Mrs. Hinkle's boy who got us famous."

Old Thomas Seaton had opened his sleepy eyes after dinner when he heard this. "Yes, why couldn't it have been you, Tom? Or even Meg or Sandra? Any child of your mother's would have done better than Lew Hinkle."

Tom had grinned without speaking. He talked less and less and looked brighter, smarter, and more sleek as he grew older. Still unmarried, he lived at home, but since he did not now ask for money, his father let sleeping dogs lie, though well aware that the cause for his son's solitary content, or resignation, lived in South Chedbury, in the form of a plump and pretty Italian girl. The cause for Tom's early drunkenness, Margaret had confided to Edward, was that he had fallen in love with a fair-haired English girl, whose father was an earl. The Seaton family, so notable in Chedbury, was less considerable in Great Bairnbourne Castle. Mrs. Seaton in wounded pride had demanded that Tom come back to Chedbury at once, and Tom had obeyed, to forget rather easily, it seemed, his first love. He had recalled it uneasily, however, upon reading Harrow's book, when the rebellious hero had

loved just such a young English girl as he still remembered, when alone sometimes at night. The likeness had not escaped Mrs. Seaton's sharpness, and between mother and son there had arisen an irritability increased by their determined silence upon the subject of their thoughts.

Even between Edward and Margaret, Lewis Harrow's book had brought a small discord. Physical cowardice she hated and she smelled something foul in the idea of a soldier, an officer, choosing death at the hands of his clan rather than his enemy.

"Maybe they were his real enemies," Edward had suggested.

She had given him a quick look. "It's not like you to be subtle, Ned."

"I don't do it easily," he conceded.

"Explain yourself," she demanded.

But he could never do that and he had tried less and less as the years passed. Words had been essential to her in the early years of their marriage and he had made earnest attempt to use them freely to her then. The fluency that was natural to her made him sweat with effort and he gave it up as unnatural to him.

"I can't explain myself," he now said.

"Try!" So she urged him. When he hesitated she said, biting her red underlip, "How strange it is that men don't mind stripping their bodies naked before women, but ask them to uncover their thoughts and they grow as shy as virgins!"

She had settled herself on the couch to read the evening this went on, and half exasperated, half baffled, he had stopped on his way upstairs to tell the children good night and had taken her head between his two hands, had kissed her and gone on his way. He no longer quarreled with her for any reason.

Meanwhile talk had continued in Chedbury. There had been a good deal of discussion at a meeting two weeks before as to whether they would use the church or the courthouse. The new minister had decided the matter by rising to his feet, very tall and dry. "I've read Harrow's book," he had said. "I feel it would not

be safe to allow him the use of the church. Profanity seems natural to him. We'd better compromise on the courthouse."

People had laughed. The salt of their minister's tongue was their everyday blessing. His sermons were plain and sometimes they made a man angry, but at least one knew what they were about. Joseph Barclay had been to sea in his youth and had been converted in Liverpool by an English Methodist preacher making the rounds of the red-light district to rescue the men from the ships. This preacher had rescued the young officer by mighty words and a loud quarrel with the woman who had him in tow. With his two hands he had laid hold on the boy and forced him out into the rainy darkness of an English night. He had taken him home and lectured him and prayed with him and held him God's prisoner until he promised to repent.

So Joseph Barclay had repented and had one day returned to America to keep his word with God. He was fifty years old now, and Chedbury had called him when Dr. Hart had said they must. At seventy Dr. Hart had gone out and searched for the man who must take his place in Chedbury. He had found him in a little church in the city of Lowell, a church so blackened by factory smoke outside and the grimy hands of the congregation inside that anyone else would have passed it by. But Francis Hart had heard of the man who spoke so plainly that people always knew what he was saying, and there he had found him. It had not been too easy to persuade the plain-speaking man to come to Chedbury. "I belong here among the factory folk," he had told old Dr. Hart. "I don't like dressing up. And when I preach I'm liable to take the skin off."

"Factory folk get their skin taken off in other ways," Dr. Hart had retorted. "Nobody dares to skin my folk in Chedbury except me, and after I'm dead they'll grow soft."

He had lived to hear the new minister preach a couple of fine searing sermons and then he had died of pneumonia caught on a zero morning when he insisted on shoveling the snow a blizzard

had thrown on his front walk. People did not always like Joseph Barclay but nobody dared rebel because old Dr. Hart had brought him there. And the fellow told the truth so consistently that no one wanted to be the first to speak against him. There was, moreover, a certain excitement in going to church each Sunday. Joseph Barclay never said the same thing twice. He lived alone in the parsonage, was unmarried, and half the time he cooked his own meals because no woman in Chedbury would make fish chowder the way he liked it.

In the courthouse, then, the people of Chedbury sat on a late spring evening, waiting to hear what the son of old Abe Hinkle had to say. The older people could remember the family well, and when Abe died in his final drunken fit, they had helped Mrs. Hinkle by giving her monumental heaps of laundry. Many of the younger people could remember Lew Hinkle, the spindle-shanked boy who went to school with them. They distrusted the change of his name, though he made no pretense of concealing either his father's name or his reason for changing it. "No use keeping a name that's a commercial handicap," Lewis Harrow had said publicly to newspaper reporters, even in New York.

Tonight he stood, too much at ease, some thought, before his audience. He was soberly dressed in a new gray suit, his rough black hair was smooth, and the only exception that the reluctant people of Chedbury could take as they gazed at him was the color of his tie which was red. Edward himself regretted the tie. He disliked bright hues especially when worn by men, and Margaret had learned never to give him anything except a tie of a solid blue or gray. He did possess one tie of wine red that he wore usually on Christmas day with his good dark suit.

The courthouse was of an unusual and somewhat theatrical design. A hundred years ago an ambitious politician had conceived the idea of a central platform where he could hold forth upon occasions. Around this platform set against the north wall five tiers of seats rose toward the door. Since the courthouse stood

upon a hill, the effect was dramatic. It had never been more so than tonight, when all of Chedbury had come out to hear this humble and almost unknown son. The Seaton's sat together at the left, and with them were Baynes and Sandra, come from New York today. Edward had toyed with the notion of inviting them to the brief dinner that he and Margaret had eaten with Lewis Harrow, and then had decided against it. Sandra had a way of stimulating men to talk and he did not want Harrow exhausted before his speech. There was no use in wasting on Sandra witticisms that might amaze an audience. Sandra had put on a brilliant green dress without sleeves, and she had combed her red hair high, like the crest of a bird. Edward looked away from her impatiently. New York was bringing out the worst in her. Old Tom Seaton was drowsing in his seat and Mrs. Seaton nudged him with her elbow. That was the difference between them. Old Tom slept into his age and she grew more wakeful as death drew near. Edward's own parents sat side by side just in front of himself and Margaret, and with them was Louise. So seldom did he see his sister that he looked at her now with the detached, half critical mind of a stranger. She looked rather pretty in her quiet unadorned fashion, hair parted and put back into some sort of knot at her neck and a blue dress that made her skin pale and white. Her profile was better than it had been when she was a girl. A certain thickness she had then was worn away and she looked delicate.

He stopped looking at Louise after he perceived these general improvements and settled himself to listen to Lewis Harrow. He had taken Harrow down to the platform a few minutes before and had made a brief introduction. He knew that he was a poor speaker, and being uneasy on his feet, he said a few terse words in a dogged monotone, bare and without congratulation, either to Harrow or to himself as the publisher of a spectacularly successful first novel. But Chedbury was used to Edward Haslatt and they did not judge him. To brisk short applause, he had walked to his seat beside Margaret. She looked up at him softly, laughter

hidden in her eyes, and he felt her hand steal into his and cling.

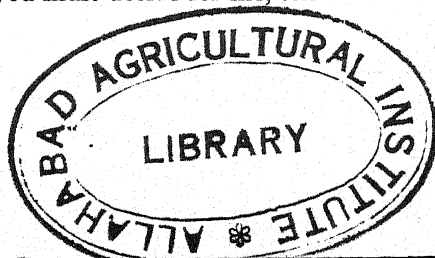
He pondered for a moment the meaning of this inexplicable handclasp as the people settled themselves to listen to Harrow. Nothing Margaret did was without significance. She did not give him one idle caress. Why, then, he asked silently, did she now press her soft palm into his, under the careful cover of her fur cape? Distracted for a moment, he scarcely heard what Harrow was saying.

Lewis Harrow spoke quickly, his deep voice penetrating into the farthest reach of the great round hall. Edward had never seen him discomfited, even when attacked by a galaxy of newspaper men, but tonight he perceived a slight belligerence in Harrow's manner, as though he felt himself on trial before the people of Chedbury. They were haunted perhaps by the memory of a hundred years of other trials in this very place, judgments upon men who had stolen what was not theirs, who had taken lives of other men, women who had wept, clutching the hands of bewildered children. The courthouse was a haunted place.

Lewis Harrow seemed to feel it. He lifted his head and stared about him at them all. The hard central light poured down light and heat upon him and he saw the faces of the people gleaming at him out of the surrounding shadows. Then his diffidence left him and clasping his hands behind him he began to speak with sudden ease.

"What I have done proves nothing, to you or to myself. You have done me an honor in coming to hear me tonight, but I shall not have deserved that honor until I write my second book, and my third. After the third then you may judge me and I will accept your judgment. I can write about war—yes, I grant you that I made you feel something of what men suffer in a war. But anybody can write about such melodrama. The story is ready made. The stage of war is small, the pattern set. The common words are ready—patriotism, bravery, death.

"But can I write about life? That you must decide for me, ten



years from now. Take our town! If I were to write a novel about Chedbury where would I begin? Where would you begin, if you were I? I grew up here, among you. You knew my parents. With my mother I came in and out of your houses. Our door was the back door, but for my purposes that was the best one. I saw your kitchens. I heard the underside of your lives. Destined to be what I am, I had even then the mind of a writer. That is, I never forgot anything I saw or heard, I still do not. More than that, I understand far more than a word, I hear infinitely beyond a whisper.

"Where shall I begin my next book? Shall I begin with young Dr. Walters? You remember Bertram Walters, how brilliant he was, how handsome. Why he left Boston and came to settle in our little town we never knew. It took me a long time to find out. Until I knew I could not understand any more than you did, why, at the height of his youth and strength, he should kill himself one hot July day. I can remember the day and the hour. I had been swimming with some of you down at the old hole in the river. You left me at Bolster's Alley where I lived. We in Bolster's Alley heard things before you did, and we already knew that he had shot himself in exactly the correct spot in his heart. He was a perfectionist, you'll remember. I loped up to the Walters' house and saw him dead—just for a minute before they put me out. Something in his face made me hang around the undertaker's place the next day. Jake Bentley and I were friends in a queer sort of way and he let me come in sometimes and look at the dead people. I looked a long time at Dr. Walters. Jake and I talked and wondered why he did it. Something Jake said helped me to find out, later—half accidentally. It would be telling my story too soon if I told you now.

"Or should I begin with Bolster's Alley itself? There was an alley! You have cleaned it up since I lived there. Our town officers are more efficient than they used to be. Maybe it's just that we have more conscience than we used to have. The old Hinkle shack is gone. When I lived there with my mother, you'd be sur-

prised at the good citizens I used to see sometimes, on a dark night, walking along the Alley. My mother was a good woman, too old and fat, maybe, for sin, but there were some beautiful women in the Alley.

"Maybe I ought to begin my story with Henry Croft, that matchless teacher, who beat me half to death when I was a rebellious schoolboy. That was only a decade and a half ago—seems strange that things have changed so much that if anybody beat a child now in the public school of Chedbury, he'd be arrested. But there was war then between Henry Croft and me and he always won. He won, too, in another way. I'm no fool and I began to see that the reason he couldn't keep from beating me was that he knew I had something in me and he was furious because I didn't see it for myself. I guessed it one day, when I was around thirteen. He grew angry with me because I hadn't written a composition. He said to me, 'Down with your bags,' and I got ready. He stared at me and began to cry. The whip dropped from his hand to the floor. For the first time in my life I was scared of him. Then he began to shout at me through his tears. 'Aren't you going to make something of yourself?' That was what he bellowed at me. I pulled up my pants, and I knew he would never beat me again. Then I could talk to him. Then he could talk to me. In the next four years he was the most wonderful teacher a boy ever had. He set my feet upon the path."

Margaret had drawn her hand away and now she sat leaning forward on her elbows. The tears were running down her cheeks. Edward had forgotten her, but he turned and saw the glistening of her eyes. The people of Chedbury were motionless in silence. Mrs. Croft sat in her widow's weeds, tall and gaunt, her face like staring stone. Little old Mrs. Walters bent her head. Thomas Seaton was wide awake and Mrs. Seaton was waving her small sandalwood fan swiftly to and fro.

Edward leaned toward Margaret. "Can we let this go on?"

She shook her head without reply, her eyes fixed on Harrow.

"Where shall I begin my book of life?" he was asking. "Shall I begin it in one of our big houses? It is a house full of life, as you well know. Long ago a strong man married a beautiful woman and they produced beautiful children. What becomes of beautiful children? They begin so full of promise. What happens to them? Shall I tell that story?"

"I might choose another house and a plain honest sort of family, the family that lives in every other house in Chedbury. They don't struggle with poverty but they struggle with life. The man started out with modest dreams of himself, of love. The woman had a little dream, too, nothing very big, of course. We are cautious folk here. No use dreaming about what we can't have! But the dreams of this man and this woman were all cautious, possible ones. They could be more than dreams. But they weren't. Why? The man and woman were faithful to each other, of course. We never saw him in the Alley. He always went to church on Sunday with his wife and his children, and he wasn't afraid of anything—except life itself. Ask him if he wanted something, from a helping of chicken pot pie at a church supper to a million dollars and he would have said the same thing, 'I don't care if I do.' The phrase expresses him. Perhaps it expresses Chedbury. And yet, in spite of his dreams, which never came true because he never dared to make them big enough, or bold enough, he's had a life. In a way, he's even had a love, and so has the woman. Yes, perhaps theirs is the true story of Chedbury."

Against his own will, Edward glanced at his father and mother but he could not see their faces. Dangerous, indeed, this fellow Harrow! He had taken Chedbury into the hollow of his hand, and he was looking at them all, like a great Gulliver. They'd be angry tomorrow, and he'd hear from it. Then suddenly he had a grim sort of pleasure in it. Whatever happened, he had his big man. Harrow would make Haslatt and Sons known everywhere in the world. But first it was his job to make Harrow known everywhere in the world, a job he'd dreamed of doing somehow, if he

could find the man. He could feel in his hands already the big new book. While Harrow talked, Edward, in his mind, turned fine paper, studied the perfect type, considered the width of margins and the design of a jacket. What color for the binding? Wine red, perhaps, and gold stamping? Tomorrow he'd finger his way through his typebook. He was in the grip of his own private frenzy of creation.

He did not notice that night, when they went home and to bed, that Margaret was silent and thoughtful. She went about the house in her usual way, pouring a last saucer of milk for Mary's kitten, peeling an orange and eating it by the dying coals of the living-room fire, and watching him, her blue eyes thoughtful, as he tested doors, pulled down shades and wound the clock in the hall. He went upstairs before her, because it was he, rather than she, who looked at the two older children. They had been moved out of the nursery into rooms of their own when each was seven, and he tiptoed to one bedside and then the other. Tom he always visited first, because he liked to linger by Mary. The boy was lying outstretched and strong, one leg outside the covers. The windows were wide open and a cool breeze, smelling of the not too distant sea, filled the room. He covered Tom and remembered that his son had lost a tooth that day. He took a nickel from his pocket, and feeling under the pillow he found the tooth and left the nickel. Then he went into the hall and opened the next door.

The night wind was cool here, too, but Mary was curled under a thin silk quilt and when he touched her forehead he found it damp with heat. This child had always the impulse to hide herself, to burrow deep into shelter. He rolled back the quilt cautiously from her neck and she woke at once and stared at him with strange eyes. He saw that she did not recognize him.

"It's me, dearie," he whispered, bending over her.

She flung up her arms and locked them behind his head. "You scared me."

"You mustn't get scared so easily."

"Because I thought it was somebody else!"

"It's always I who come here at night to see if you're all right."

"It mightn't always be you."

Some far truth in this confounded him. He kissed her and drew her arms gently from his neck. "Go to sleep, Mary."

She curled down again and he tiptoed out of the room and met Margaret coming from the nursery.

"Sandy all right?" he inquired.

"Robust and lovely," Margaret said.

The phrase fitted their third child. Sandy, not beautiful except as pink cheeks, blond hair, and innocent blue eyes always carry the implication of beauty, was rich in health and simple charm. She was a child upon whom Edward did not waste an instant's worry.

Later, before he got into his bed, he lingered by Margaret's bed, and remembering the clasp of her hand he stooped and gave her a tentative kiss. She received it without enthusiasm, though kindly, and mindful of the lesson that the years had taught him, he smoothed her hair for a moment and then left her. The exhilaration of his spirit prevented him from perceiving her unusual silence and he slept.

"A nice nest of hornets," Mr. Haslatt said the next morning. He was waiting at the door of the elevator when his son stepped out of it rather more briskly than usual.

A collected stubbornness had gathered in Edward as he proceeded on his usual way to the office. The greetings that he received from meetings in the morning on the trolley were always curt. Chedbury was not at its best before noon. But this morning mumbled words were only nods and men read their morning papers without raising their heads as he passed.

All this was introduction to his father's gritty remark, and Edward, inwardly disturbed, refused to acknowledge it.

"What's the matter?" he asked with involuntary deceit.

"Looks like you'll have to take a choice between that fellow and the rest of the town," his father said.

Edward did not reply. He passed between the desks in the main office without speaking and certainly without allowing himself to notice the suppressed and curious looks that the girls sent him. He went into his office and shut the door after his father.

"Sit down," he said.

He sat down himself behind the square old desk that had once belonged to Mr. Mather and his father took the chair opposite. He was never comfortable thus facing his father, but today he did not allow his feelings to move him. If it were to be necessary to fight all Chedbury for Lewis Harrow, let it begin here. He waited for his father.

"I don't see as Lew Hinkle had any reason to talk the way he did last night," Mr. Haslatt said. He wore an old pepper-and-salt suit upon which the thread had worn down to gray, which made more dun the grayness of his skin and hair. He had grown thin with age and his long nose was pink at the tip. In cold or excitement a drop quivered at his nostril and Edward repressed his old youthful impulse to mention it. If he had to contend with his father on the large matter of Lewis Harrow, he would not indulge himself in small personal repulsions. He looked toward the window. Chedbury was most beautiful now, but man could be as vile here as anywhere.

"You have to let a writer talk anyway he wants," he said. Then without giving his father opportunity to answer he went on. "Baynes will be in soon, I suppose."

"I've lived my life in this town," his father replied.

"I intend to live mine here, too," Edward said doggedly.

"Your mother says Mrs. Walters is terribly upset."

Edward wheeled in his chair. "The real question is whether we are going to go to the top with Harrow or whether we're going to stay right here in Chedbury along with Mrs. Walters and her kind."

"You can't please God and Mammon," Mr. Haslatt said solemnly.

"Mrs. Walters isn't either of them," Edward retorted.

Upon this foolish conversation Baynes burst into the office like a soaring rocket, scattering good humor and optimism. He had on a new suit, a striped thing, and the shoulders had a silly sloped effect.

"Thought I'd find you two here! Wasn't that a swell performance last night? Skinned half the town, didn't he? All as neat as you please! Took 'em out of cold storage. We've been fighting at the Seaton's or I'd have been here sooner."

"Mr. Seaton sore?" Mr. Haslatt inquired.

"You can't make that tough old hide sore," Baynes said. "Mrs. Seaton is all upset over bad taste, of course. Curious, young Tom is on her side. Nobody is going to have any peace in the town if Harrow really writes that book. If it's half the book he says it's going to be, we're all set for a fortune."

"That how Sandra looks at it?" Edward asked.

"Sandra's out helping him to pick the site for his house." Baynes sat on the window sill and swung his leg.

"He ain't going to live here!" Mr. Haslatt exclaimed.

"He is," Baynes replied. "He doesn't want to live in any of the old houses he could buy. That's Chedbury for you. Yelling about him and still they'd sell him the house from under their feet if he paid enough. He's going to build his house—wants to make his own ghosts, he says."

Edward considered this with the silence usual to him. Certainly it would have been easier if Lewis Harrow had chosen to live at the safe distance of New York, where Chedbury thought writers belonged. But he would do nothing to jeopardize his precious possession. Once in a lifetime a really great writer fell into a publisher's lap. He saw other publishers, big-city fellows, swarming like sharks about the frail bark of Haslatt and Sons. He would indulge Harrow to the last degree, mindful of the genius that the man contained—a gem in a casket of clay.

"He wants to live where he can look down on Chedbury," Baynes was saying. "Sandra's taking him to the top of Granite."

"Who's goin' to build the road up there?" Mr. Haslatt demanded.

"He will," Baynes said joyously, "out of the money he makes from us."

Mr. Haslatt's eyes grew glassy. "We're gettin' in too deep."

Edward turned to his desk. "We'll swim."

At the brusqueness in his voice, Mr. Haslatt rose. "I'd better get to work and leave you two to do the same," he declared, and closed the door sharply behind him.

Edward looked at his younger brother. Baynes was taking on a curious half-dissipated air. He had grown a strong dark mustache which he trimmed to show his still youthful mouth, and as he stared out of the window he twisted one end of the mustache thoughtfully. His dark eyes narrowed. "We ought to get Harrow nicely married to some high-born Chedbury female. Then he could rip us all up without damage. I don't know the girls any more, though, and you never did. Pity I got Sandra—that would have been so beautiful. A Seaton wed to the washerwoman's son!" Baynes laughed silently.

Edward was repelled by both words and laughter. Baynes had grown coarse from living in New York. Maybe it was only because of Sandra. She was coarse, he had always imagined secretly. There was none of Margaret's delicacy in her, and New York had polished away any semblance of youthful reserve. Sandra, neither young nor old, had taken on all the gloss of a silver statue.

"I'm surprised you talk of your own wife in that way," Edward said. "I hope you two aren't growing apart." He was aware of something stiff and old-fashioned in what he said, but he did not know how to put the words differently.

Baynes was blithe. He swung his leg from the desk and sat down in the chair which his father had left. "Sandra's all right—has to have her head, of course. All women do since the war.

Notice how different females are since we came marching home?"

"Since I didn't march, I don't notice it," Edward said dryly. He was sorting his morning's mail carefully into piles, ready for dictation, and he observed with pleasure a statement from a paper mill that the cost of paper had gone down again. It had been ruinously high during the war because the government had used so much to print stuff nobody read, anyhow.

"You and Meg are growing old graciously."

The voice of his younger brother, teasing and impudent, roused Edward. He folded the morning newspaper and leaning over his desk in a gesture unwontedly youthful, he clapped Baynes on the head.

Baynes pretended alarm. "Hey—there's life in the old dog yet."

Upon this playfulness Jane, the secretary, opened the door. She stared at the two brothers with gravity, decided to ignore what she had seen and came forward.

"About that new type," she began.

Edward sat back, and determined against shame before this elderly creature whom he had inherited from Haslatt and Mather, he answered mildly, "Come in, Jane. I've decided on the Oxford. This new book is going to be twice as long, I can see."

Baynes interrupted, "Want me to wait?"

"Yes. I want to hear every damn city trick we can turn."

So seldom did he swear that Baynes looked surprised and Jane turned a muddy red. Both yielded at once to Edward the place of master of the firm. Jane, respectful for the moment, murmured assent and withdrew, and Baynes settled down to business.

For two hours the brothers sat in close conference, more deeply akin in their common reverence for the good fortune that had fallen into their hands than even they were in blood. Baynes talked in his new impetuous fashion, his sentences city clipped, and Edward listened, weighing, assessing, deciding. They laid plans for advance advertising, for a New York dinner, for some of the new cocktail parties that were becoming the fashion. With grow-

ing generosity Edward acknowledged that Baynes and Sandra were becoming essential to Haslatt and Sons. He himself could never have planned so dashing a program, and he would not have allowed Margaret to participate in something that in his heart he considered undignified. But the war, he conceded, had changed everything except Chedbury.

On Granite Mountain Lewis Harrow was roaming. He had mounted one hillock after another upon that massive bosom, looking down at Chedbury with critical eyes. Now as the circle of choice narrowed he climbed a broad smooth height for the fourth time. "This is still the best one," he announced to Sandra.

She, looking a little paler even than usual, was trying not to pant. She sank to a gray rock. "Thank God."

He looked down on her with familiar and cynical eyes. She was the new modern woman whom he had seen in the capitals of Europe and in New York. With all her efforts she did not compare to her older sister. Mrs. Haslatt was a beauty, the sort one saw in the paintings in the Louvre. Queer how he had so loved the monstrosity of a museum that he spent all his leaves in it! There wasn't a girl on the streets of Paris to compare to the lovely women he saw in the Louvre—those women whom he could never conquer.

"You're not as tough as you look," he told Sandra with intentional rudeness. He always wanted to be rude to women like her. He longed to hurt them.

"But the way you've climbed," Sandra complained.

"You didn't have to come."

"Indeed I did. It's all business."

"What—this?"

"Certainly, you're our Great Author—didn't you know?"

"Hell, I know well enough."

"Ask and you shall have anything!" She rose dramatically, holding out her hands.

He turned away from her. "Thanks—I want very little. A house on top of this hill—a low house made of granite, with big windows."

"Where you'll live alone?"

"I've always lived alone."

"Need you?" The blond head under a little green hat was gracefully inclined.

"No, I don't need to—I want to."

He began walking down the mountain at great speed, the loose stones rushing under his feet, and she followed.

"With such a temper," she said sweetly, "how wise to live alone!"

He did not answer this, and seeing the broadness of his back she called, "Chalk that off—I didn't say it."

He laughed then and turning he put his arm through hers and they ran down the mountain at dangerous speed. She liked it. Glancing at her rather bold profile he saw that the danger had lit her green eyes and reddened her cheeks. It was a familiar sight. He was quite aware of his power over women and he had used it so often that now he knew he was ready for someone quite different—someone wholly different from this starved slenderness, this sharply pallid face, these chilly thin hands. Plenty of catlike female passion here, of course, but that was all. And passion was cheap—the price was low in any market. It had ceased to be fun. He wanted it with decorations—or perhaps foundations. He wanted something to worship.

They got into his little roadster at the bottom of the hill and wound their way down into Chedbury. At the Seaton house he stopped and she, laying her hand upon his coat, persuaded him. "Come in for a little while."

"You dare me to?"

"Why?"

"I saw your mother looking at me last night through a lorgnette."

"Maybe she'd like you better close."

"All right. If the fur flies it won't be mine."

He climbed out and followed her with stolid footsteps into the great front door. "Handsome house," he murmured, "the wings are wonderful. It took genius to dare to put those balustrades around all the roofs."

"My father did that."

He braced his shoulders and prepared for a handsome old lady with lorgnette and a somnolent old man in a shapeless tweed suit. Old Tom Seaton was not in the big living room but he did not notice it. For Margaret was there—Mrs. Haslatt, he corrected himself. He had kept thinking about her through half the night as she had looked in her own house, as she moved about, so content that it made him angry. Out of this anger he had conceived the things he had later said to Chedbury. She was a queen, possessing a realm and yet, somehow, seeming careless of it. Did she love that dull fellow Haslatt? How could she? Yet she looked impregnable—passionately pure, perhaps. He postponed the thought of passion. He wanted to respect her—perhaps worship her a bit. Life was really fearfully empty.

He went forward gladly, seeing in the light of day that beautiful warm woman whom he had seen last night at her own dinner table. "Mrs. Haslatt!" he exclaimed. "How lucky! Indeed, I didn't expect to see you so soon again."

He clasped her hand in both his own and old Mrs. Seaton sitting by the window observed him with lifted eyebrows. She had withered without growing more gentle, and now her cool gray eyes observed this coarse young man who was holding Margaret's hand. A genius, Margaret had called him. She was too worldly wise not to distrust genius while she valued it. There was nothing more dangerous. And Edward, poor fellow, had none of it. Margaret had married a good man, an excellent man, who was even making her comfortably and quietly rich, but he had no genius. Fortunately this fellow came from impossibly low antecedents. The Has-

latts were not aristocrats, but it was a respectable New England family—not quite local gentry, perhaps, but not merchants.

"How do you do, Mr. Harrow," she said, lisping frostily.

"How do you do, Madame Seaton," he replied grandly. He bowed over the narrow old hand she extended.

Only a lowborn person could be so exaggerated, she felt. She was shaken, nevertheless, by the tigerlike eyes so near her own. They were not dark, as she had supposed. They were greenish yellow—an unpleasant color. She withdrew her hand.

Sandra had flung herself into a chair. "He's going to build on the Spur," she announced. She pulled off her hat and shook out her short hair.

"First I must find out who owns it," Harrow said. He sat down by Margaret upon the couch with such assurance that she moved away from him involuntarily. He exuded some sort of faint animal odor, not unpleasant and yet which she disliked.

"I imagine anybody would be glad to sell a piece of Granite," she said.

"I will tempt and beguile and bewitch anybody into doing it," he said turning his tiger-colored eyes upon her. "I will make it impossible for anybody to refuse me."

Mrs. Seaton was suddenly overcome with total dislike for this presence. After all, she had never sat in the same room with the son of a laundress. She rose and walked slowly to the open French window. "Your father has been asleep quite long enough," she observed to her daughters. "I can see him lying out there under the elm tree with his handkerchief over his face. I shall wake him and tell him he must amuse me."

"Wonderful that he can still amuse," Lewis declared. "What a marriage, madame!"

She inclined her head without answering this ribaldry, and they watched her trailing gray skirts move slowly down the steps.

Now the animal presence became very strong indeed, and the summer air was suddenly stifling. Seated close to Lewis Harrow,

it was too near, and Margaret rose. "I must be going home—the children will be waiting for luncheon."

"Invite me," Harrow said shamelessly. "I want to see that beautiful child, Mary. Somewhere she will be entwined in the pages of my book, a little delicate vine, green and tender."

"We have only the lightest of noon meals."

Margaret's unwilling voice protested and he refused to accept it. "It is Mary I want to see."

He followed her from the room with strong footsteps and Sandra, peering out of the window, saw with some astonishment her elder sister seated in the roadster and whirled away. Tom lounged into the room at this moment. He was beginning to grow gray early, and this gave him a look of false distinction.

"Damn quiet house," he remarked. "Where's everybody?"

"Gone," Sandra said, and continued to stare out of the window in a peculiar fashion.

When Edward let himself into his home that night there was nothing to intimate that there had been an animal presence there in his absence. The wide hall was calm and since he was late, he knew that Margaret was upstairs putting their youngest child to bed, and that Mary and Tommy were in the process of cleaning and changing upon which Margaret insisted before dinner. The second maid, Nora, whom he had engaged some weeks before because he thought Margaret looked tired, now stole out of the back-hall door and took his hat and stick.

"Put a little sherry in the living room," he ordered and then slowly he mounted the stairs.

It had been an exhausting, exciting, dangerous sort of day. He had plunged deeply into something new and he was at once frightened and exhilarated. If Harrow's next book failed Haslatt and Sons would fail with it, for he had mortgaged all his profits from the war book. It would be close sailing until he had the finished manuscript in his hands and could decide for himself

whether Harrow had more than one book in him. That was the test, true always, of a writer. One book did not prove anyone. What Haslatt and Sons wanted—that is, what Edward himself wanted—was a man who was a fountain of books, throwing them off with every new facet and stage in his development.

At the top of the stairs the half-opened door revealed to him Margaret with Sandy in her arms beside the crib. She wore the long blue peignoir which he especially liked and his heart throbbed once or twice at the sight of her beauty. Marriage had become her, he flattered himself. She had bloomed gently, like a rose in mild sunshine. He, being a fancier of roses in a small way, liked in his secret musings to liken his wife to a rose. Such was his inner shyness that he had only once or twice been able to tell her of this likeness. Why he had not been able to keep open the doors of communication between himself and Margaret he did not know and he often pondered. Perhaps he loved her too well, and his old defensive pride rose against complete self-revelation. So large was her nature, so comprehensive her understanding, her ancestry so superior to his, he sometimes feared, that all his old sensitivity remained alert in him, the more wary because he could not tell her that it was there. He was ashamed of this and yet helpless to change it. He wanted her to believe that he was no ordinary man and yet there were times when he knew he was only that. The uncertainty of his inner atmosphere was the result of his own inability to judge himself. Whether he was better than other men he did not know. He suspected that his inordinate pride was a sort of vanity. He believed that he was better than the average but he was not sure. Had he been sure, he was coming to think, he could have spoken freely to his wife at any moment.

As it was, though his heart quickened, though he went into the nursery and took her in his arms, child and all, he could only murmur, "I ought not to touch you—I haven't washed." These words his lips said while his silent heart adored.

He imagined, all his sharp senses aware, that there was some-

thing reserved in the kiss she gave him. This possibility rendered him completely dumb. With alarm fluttering in his breast he kissed his daughter and leaned on the side of the crib while Margaret covered the child for sleep.

They left the room hand in hand and again he imagined or perceived the less than usual warmth in her hand, although it clasped his with resolution. But there was a difference between clinging and determination.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered promptly. "Except—I don't like your Lewis Harrow."

"My Lewis Harrow?" he repeated, smiling slightly.

"Yes, yours," she said, "you've captured him, haven't you?"

"I hope so—for the sake of business."

"There it is," she exclaimed. "I don't like to think he's paying for our bread and butter—"

"And his own cake," Edward put in.

She threw him a strange look, which he could not comprehend. "Do you know why I don't like him? Because he invited himself to luncheon today alone with the children and me!"

"Why didn't you telephone me?"

She looked at him in astonishment. "Honestly, Ned, I didn't think of it." Her amazement at herself was so real that he smiled again.

"You must always think of me, you know," he said mildly.

"Was he nice to the children?"

"He didn't notice Tommy or Sandy, but he was foolish to Mary. If she were anything but a child I'd say he—made love to her."

"That's impossible, Margaret."

"Ned, it was disgusting, really!"

He saw that her cheeks were flaming and in the same instant, her eyes were so brightly blue, her hair so black and flying, that he felt her beauty burned into the very flesh of his heart. Had she

thus appeared to Harrow? Feeling with dismay the rush of old jealousy he had thought long since disciplined from him, he went into the next room, which was his own, that she might not discern his pitiable condition and grow angry. She had not for years been greatly angry with him, for he had not for those same years allowed his young green jealousy to show itself in words or pique. Now he knew it was there in him still, and must at all costs be hidden from her for the sake of his own self-respect in her eyes.

He felt suddenly very tired and he sank into his old leather chair and covered his eyes with his hands. Why should Harrow shower his attentions upon the child Mary? Why Mary and not Tommy or Sandy? Why except that with his cursed novelist's perception and imagination he had already understood that Margaret did not love her eldest child too well? And with this he had forged a cunning cruel weapon to draw Margaret's eyes to himself. Not for one moment did Edward believe that Lewis Harrow cared for any child.

The monstrosity of this behavior in a man, that he used a child for such a purpose, mingled in Edward's thoughts with jealousy lest that Margaret had indeed noticed Harrow because of this wile and with anger that his favorite child should have been made a tool. He sat motionless in the chair, longing furiously to find Harrow and tell him to get out of his sight and forever. This fury he dealt with in continued silence and by means of reason. Harrow was less than a man. He was a thing of emotions and imaginations, fluid with creation, irresponsible, untrustworthy, a creature to be watched and controlled—yes, and used. It was folly to be jealous of him—as well be jealous of a drunkard or a fool. The man had no being except in imagination. Whatever he had done was no more real than the drama in a play—the fellow was probably acting out a scene in the novel he was about to write. It would be giving him undue importance to think of it as something a real man had done. Genius was as valuable and as unpredictable, perhaps as ungovernable, as the waves of the sea.

Upon this slow rationalizing he heard his door open softly and his daughter Mary come stealing in. It troubled him sometimes that she moved so stilly, as though her vitality were not enough for the speed and noise of childhood. Yet she looked healthy enough as she stood there in the door in her little white muslin frock. She was smiling and he saw the dimples in her cheeks, the gift her mother had given her. Margaret's dimples, born again!

"Shall I come in, Papa?"

"Please do, darling—though I haven't washed yet."

"I won't stay."

She walked softly across the floor, almost tiptoe, and leaned against him. When he put his arm around her she rested her head upon his shoulder and he smelled the clean freshness of her dark hair.

"Had a good day, dear?"

"Yes—almost."

"Why only almost?"

"Papa, do you like Mr. Harrow?"

He evaded this. "Mamma says he was here to lunch."

"Yes. He likes me very much."

"Did he say so?"

"Yes."

He was furious again with Lewis Harrow. This daughter of his! He held her close. "We all like you—love you, you know."

"I know." She sighed and he forbore to ask the cause for it.

It was so much easier not to ask. He felt her lips at his ear. "Papa."

"Yes?"

"But he likes me better than he does anybody else."

"Did he say that?"

"Yes."

"Then he told a lie!" These words escaped him forcibly.

She actually drooped. "Did he, Papa?"

"Yes! And it was very wrong for him to talk like that to you, Mary. Mamma didn't like it. She told me about it. And you must

forget what he said. Little girls get all the love they need from their parents. You must think about school now, you know, and your friends—Millicent Bascom and Josephine Hill. They're very nice girls. And in two years or so you may have dancing lessons and then you will have other friends, too—boys of your own age."

He was taking it far too seriously, he told himself. He was making everything worse, deepening the very impressions which he hoped to erase. He rose. "Now run along, Mary. I must get ready for dinner."

She went out of the room then, her step lingering, and he went into the bathroom and scrubbed his hands with unnecessary vigor.

That, he might have thought, was the end of it. The dinner passed as usual. He could always be sure of a good meal at night, a dish or two that Margaret had planned and to which she had given some touch of her own. Tonight it was veal, baked in French fashion with wine and herbs, and for dessert a blueberry pie. He was growing to be something of a connoisseur in food, for his appetite was variable and he ate better if he considered flavor and texture. Tonight his awareness of everything was sharp. He saw himself at the head of his own table and unconsciously he straightened his spare tall frame as he looked at Margaret. She had put on a gown of some thin silver-gray stuff, so old he had almost forgotten—or else it was new.

"Is that a new dress?" he asked.

"You should be ashamed, Ned," she replied. "It was part of my trousseau. I wore it in New Orleans, don't you remember? Years ago!"

"I remember only a glorious haze," he said smiling.

"I tried it on for fun—just to see if I could wear it. I believe I'm actually a little thinner than I was then."

He kept looking at her after that, knowing that the girl Margaret had no beauty to compare to this, his wife's.

And from them had come these children. They sat one on either side of the table, quiet at the end of the day. Even Tommy ate in

phlegmatic silence. He was a hearty eater, and some day he would be a big ungainly man like old Thomas. But Mary was delicate, and in spite of her prettiness there was something about her which reminded him of his sister.

"Seen Louise lately?" he asked Margaret.

Mary lifted her head. "She was cross with me today, Papa—a little—because I was late in the afternoon for school."

"Did you tell her why?" he asked.

"Yes, I said Mr. Harrow was here with us for lunch and then she got cross—only a little. She said it was no excuse."

"It wasn't, I suppose."

"He kept talking," Margaret said vaguely.

"We ought to have Louise over," he said. "Maybe we could have her sometime with Harrow. It would give her something special. We never do anything for Louise."

Margaret replied, "Of course. Let's remember. Only why must we have him again?"

She made her query with raised and quivering eyebrows, as though laughter waited, and he gave her a steady look. "Think of it as business."

Tommy shifted his attention from a second piece of pie. "I don't like Mr. Harrow," he said in his large deep voice. "When he grabs me he holds too hard. It hurts."

"Hit him in the snoot," Edward said suddenly.

His children looked at him in amazement and then broke into joyful laughter. So seldom was their father funny! Their laughter restored wholesomeness to the evening and Edward in the secrecy of his inner being ridiculed his jealousy.

The small house of Haslatt and Sons was shaken to its roots. A tornado had seized it, bringing life, giving growth, forcing heat and light and a spasm of wind. Again and again Edward Haslatt wished that he had never met Lewis Harrow, that the fellow had stayed in France after the war, that he had been lost

in New York, almost that he had strayed into the portals of some other publishing house rather than have come to the quiet town of Chedbury to lay hold upon his own budding business. The swelling advance sales of Harrow's new book marched across the country like a triumphant beast. A vanguard of rumor preceded the three young salesmen whom Edward hired and put into the charge of Baynes with every caution against extravagance. Caution was forgotten. The eagerness of booksellers infected Baynes and spread to the salesmen and they ran hither and thither, praising a book none of them had yet read, that no one had seen except Harrow, and he carelessly writing against time declared that it might or might not be finished by late winter.

"It must be finished," Edward said sternly. "I've gambled everything I have on that book, Lewis," and knew as he spoke that there was no promise to be had out of him.

Harrow had been engrossed in the building of a squat storm-proof house on Granite. The walls stood under a wide overhanging roof, and from a distance looked like a bird that had paused to brood upon the mountain. Harrow was amused by the likeness and enhanced it by adding feathery trellises to the wings and a thick short tower to the gate. He called his house *The Eagle* and on Sundays young people from Chedbury climbed up to see it. He had begun to live in it long before it was finished, and it pleased him to look from the windows and see persons approaching. He rushed out and brought them in, showed them through the low rooms, few in number but huge in size, the windows enormous and set so that he could see for miles when he chose to look out of them. The house stood solidly clawing the ground with its deep foundations, and though the winds roared, it was impervious. Harrow had insisted on walls eighteen inches thick, as he had seen them in the fortresses of Europe. There was neither cellar nor second floor and one room led into another in a semicircle curving toward the mountain.

To Edward the house was astonishing and hideous and he told Margaret what he thought.

"Certainly it is not the house for a family," she replied, "but then I don't think Lewis wants a family. I'm not sure he even wants a wife."

By now Harrow was so much his property that Edward did not inquire how it was that she knew this about him. Women had instinct, of course, and of instinct Margaret had her full share. His jealousy of the spring had passed or perhaps had only been submerged in the rush of increasing business. The revenge that he had feared from Chedbury after the evening in the courthouse had never been taken. Chedbury had bristled, there had been some quiet weeping by Mrs. Walters, and Mrs. Croft was permanently angry. Henry Croft had died ten years ago, and she had been happier without him, as everybody knew, and yet she had not been able to keep from thinking of him for weeks after Lewis Harrow had brought him to life again, bringing back to her the memory of a temper vicious and yet somehow only the dark side of a glittering shield.

Chedbury had grown quiet again, and people watched Harrow come and go up Granite Mountain. However they felt about him, he had his right to be among them, because he had been a child there, a queer cross-grained hungry monolith of a boy whom they had seen without notice when he had lugged baskets in and out of their kitchens; whom now, though they found him repulsive, they respected reluctantly. The weekly paper gave him no notice, and Chuck Williams, the editor, took pride in reading his name in gossip columns of city papers and literary essays in magazines and then in continuing to take no notice. Even when the new book came out, he might take no notice.

In the midst of all this Edward was wakened at two o'clock one morning by the clangor of the telephone in the hall. He rose at once and lifted the receiver and heard his mother's distracted voice.

"Edward, your father's been taken very sick."

"What is it, Mother?"

"He can't speak to me—" Her voice cracked into a sob.

"Have you called the doctor?"

"No. I didn't know what to do."

"I'll call him and then be right up."

He put up the telephone and went softly into Margaret's room. She lay high on her pillows, her long hair braided over her shoulder, her eyes closed in sleep. Tired as he was every night, it had been a long time since he had seen her asleep, and shielding her face from the flashlight he used at night, he was struck with the thinness of her cheeks. He was so close to her and yet somehow they had made no true communication for a long time. He was too busy—so busy that he had neglected to keep his promise to her, made when she said she would marry him. He had let their marriage become secondary to him. That was the problem of a man's life—how to excel in his work and still keep the woman close. Yet how he loved her!

These thoughts, scarcely more than feelings, came in the instant to the surface of his mind and he pushed them down again. He would have to do something about it, but it could not be now. He decided not to wake her, and still treading softly he went out and closed the door.

A few minutes later, having called Dr. Wynne and dressed himself, he was in his car on his way to his father. He had persuaded himself into buying the car a few weeks earlier, on the excuse that he needed it for business.

"Why don't you just say you want it?" Margaret had asked.

He had looked at her half sheepishly. "Seems extravagant, doesn't it?"

"I don't see why," she had replied. "Nothing is extravagant if you can pay for it."

Actually he had finally decided to buy it when he saw Tom Seaton running around in a small roadster on God knew what business. If Tom could buy a car, surely he with his sound progress could do so. He had spent his spare time for a week learning to

run it and now it submitted to him pleasantly and increased his sense of power. An occasion such as this, he argued, when his father was taken suddenly ill, justified a car.

He spent the last few minutes thinking about his father. With remorse he reminded himself that he had had no time for months to think about him. The old man had grown increasingly quiet in the office and for days past Edward scarcely remembered seeing him beyond a hasty greeting in the morning. Baynes had run up from New York once or twice every week to confer, and while at first their father had come in to sit with them, in the last fortnight he had not, and they had not noticed, or at least had not spoken of it. Strange how a man's parents, who had been the center of his existence, the spoke upon which the wheel of his life turned, moved out of the center into the periphery and so, he supposed, away forever.

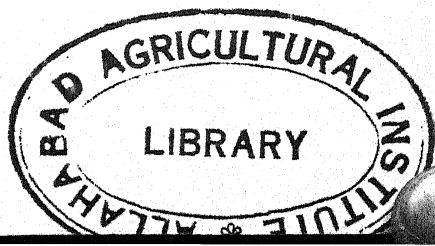
With a sense of impending and inescapable loss, he hastened out of his car and into the house. No one met him and he went straight upstairs to his father's room and opened the door. His father lay on his back in the big double bed where his parents had slept together all these years and his mother sat beside the bed in a small rocking chair tilted forward so that she leaned upon the covers, holding the pale stiff hand. The sound of his father's hard quick breathing filled the room with an angry pulse of sound. The doctor had not yet come.

"Oh, Edward," his mother moaned.

He went near the bed. "When did this happen, Mother?"

"I don't know. I was asleep and then I woke up and felt him in the middle of the bed—he always has taken the middle of the bed—and I told him to move over, just as I do every night. He always does, but tonight he didn't. I gave him a push—just a little one—and felt him so queer and heavy that I put on the light and this is the way he was. He can't even speak to me. Oh, Edward, you don't think—"

"Of course not." He sat down on the bed and looked at his



father. Some sort of dreadful subterranean force was moving in that patient lean frame. The left side of his father's face was dragged down, and a drool of saliva crept over his chin.

Edward took his own handkerchief and wiped it away. "The doctor will be here in a minute."

"He's been worrying too much," his mother moaned. "Every night he came home scared to death of what you boys are doing at the office. You shouldn't have borrowed money on the printing shop, Edward. That really belongs to him."

He had a glimpse in his mother's haggard face, made strange by the gray hair that hung loose against her cheeks, of what it meant to grow old. The old ceased to create. They grew afraid of all change, knowing the monstrous change ahead. They wanted no more to build, but only to shelter themselves. Then his own youth asserted itself. "I'm responsible, Mother," he said with an impatience which shamed him but which he could not help. "I wish Father would stop worrying."

The doorbell rang and without waiting for his mother to reply he hastened downstairs to meet the doctor.

"Hello, Ed," the young doctor said. He was still too young to show sleepless nights and long hours. His predecessor, Dr. Sulley, who had been young with Dr. Hart, the old minister, had died the year before in Florida, that land of rest and joy to which he had sent so many patients, and to which he had never found time to go until he was ready to die. Wynne had taken up the practice and was now engaged in a struggle to make his patients come to his office instead of demanding that he go to see them.

"Who does he think he is?" Chedbury growled, forgetting that its people had killed the old doctor.

"What's happened?" the new doctor asked, following Edward up the stairs.

"I'm afraid to guess," Edward said.

They went into the room together and within a minute the doctor had made his quick examination.

"Your mother had better go out and rest while I finish," he told Edward. Without a word she rose, and left the room. The old man she had loved and tended for so many years had now become a male patient and she was a stranger to him. They heard her begin to sob in the hall. The doctor was a kind man. "Better go with her," he said to Edward. "But come back in a minute."

He went out then and putting his arm about his mother's shoulders he patted her, not knowing how to comfort her. Her shoulder felt unfamiliar. Not since he was a child had he touched her and then he had lain his head upon her breast. She had been closer to him than any living creature and now she was an old woman, separated from himself by distances, unspoken and unspeakable. But he had the wisdom to know that she must do something for relief.

"If it isn't asking too much, Mother, I wish you would make us all some coffee. I'm sure Wynne would be glad of it and so would I."

She turned obediently to the stairs and he went back into the bedroom.

"Obviously a stroke," Wynne said. "A pretty bad one, I'm afraid. I'd better send a nurse. It's too much for your mother to manage. I wish Chedbury had a hospital. He can't stand the trip to Boston."

"I was afraid of a stroke," Edward murmured. His father's thin face was congested with purple blood and now his left side was very much drawn.

"I've given him something," Wynne said. "Where's the telephone?"

"In the hall," Edward replied.

He sat down in the chair where his mother had been and gazed at his father. Strange and terrifying to think that he might never hear his father speak again! Now that it was possible he wished that he had taken time in these last months to listen to his father's voice. Yet he could not have acted otherwise than he had done.

His opportunity had come to him, as in another time his father's had come, and he had been compelled to seize it. Had he yielded to his father's fears, had he let Harrow go elsewhere, he might have subsided into a mere printer again, running a small local business. As it was, he had begun to have tentacles over the whole world. Only yesterday Ben Ashton, the postman, had with some pride tossed upon his desk letters from England and France. "Looks like you're gettin' to be somebuddy, Ed," he had cackled. It was true. Harrow had ceased to be a human being; he had become a most valuable property.

This was the inescapable tragedy of life, then, that the generations withdrew from each other, and as he felt the strange pain of separation somewhere deep in his vitals, he loved his father with sudden anguish. He put out his hands and enclosed within them his father's stiff cool hand.

A week later, after days made hideous by the demands of the engine he had set in motion to sell Harrow's new book, a machine which he could neither stop nor deny in its exorbitant demand upon his time, a week during which he worked day and night, rushing between the office and his father's bedside, in which he did not try to go home, in which he saw Margaret only in passing and then at his parents' house with his mother, he and Louise and Baynes gathered hastily at what was to be a deathbed.

His mother was in the rocking chair again, where she had sat almost continuously during the week. She had got up to wash, to put on a clean dress, to eat something when Margaret called. But she would not go unless Louise took her place. Louise had found a substitute teacher and had not left the house for three days. Baynes had come from New York, leaving Sandra to fill his engagements. When the nurse came out of the silent room to call them in, Edward had paused for a moment with Margaret. They were in his old bedroom, she resting upon his bed and he in the green rep armchair that had been his Christmas present the year he was fifteen.

He had risen at the sight of the nurse and when she had gone away quickly, he had turned to Margaret, his heart beating with strange and terrible fear. She had looked at him from the pillow, and he saw that she did not want to come with him.

"I have never seen anybody die," she said in a tight frightened voice.

"Neither have I," he replied.

"Ned—I don't want to be there."

He left her without a word and had not reached the hall before he felt her hands clasping his arm.

"Ned, don't hate me."

"Of course not—only you mustn't delay me now."

Her hands dropped from his arm and he hastened into his father's room, his heart still beating hard with the strange new fear, an animal fear, he thought, as he took his place beside the bed. The presence of the nurse made them all feel strange. They were not alone together. He moved to his mother and knelt down and put his arm about her shoulder, but she did not heed him. All her being was concentrated on the dying man whom she had loved and scolded and cared for and resented and still loved in the cycle of their married life. Baynes looked pale and grave and Louise was crying and the nurse waited quietly for familiar death. It came in a moment, without struggle but with a raucous rattle and choking. Mark Haslatt was dead.

Edward bowed his head on the bed and felt his mother's arms go round his shoulder. He could not think or feel. Then with sudden clarity something occurred to him—"It'll have to be only Haslatt Brothers now," and with these unspoken words he was able to perceive his loss.

Yet life resumed its sway. Within a pitifully few days he had consigned to earth the body of his father and he knew himself the master of his own existence. Though he had not for years taken with sense of obligation anything that his father said, yet

that gray shape pervading his days had asserted its claim. Now all claim was gone and memory alone could go to work, unhampered by the living presence, to reconstruct the harassed, silent, and yet kindly man who had been his father. To his father he owed the sound foundation of his business and the principles of industry and caution to which with all his present preoccupation he still held. Prudence he had inherited from his father, and with it he wielded power over Baynes and Sandra, who had none. With prudence, too, he dealt with Lewis Harrow, compelling him to finish his book before the day when he planned formally to open his house by a great party that was to include everybody in Chedbury. "Open house for three days," Harrow declared lavishly, "day and night," he added. "Anybody can come any time."

Harrow had been repulsively pleased at the death of Mark Haslatt. "The sere and yellow leaf," he had called him with scant concealment from Edward and none at all from Baynes. Now that he was dead, Harrow was decent enough not to mention the old man, and he renewed his demands upon Haslatt Brothers, asking for outrageous advances and guarantees of advertisements. Now that his father was gone, Edward found himself renewing his prudence, so that actually the voice of his father was stronger in him than it had been in life.

Hearing this voice he met Harrow firmly one day the next winter. "The Eagle has cost me some odd thousands more than I expected," Harrow came in to announce. Arrogant with his own value he had taken on the habit of entering Edward's office unannounced. This Jane had at first forbidden, but doing battle twice or thrice with Harrow's unchecked tongue, which could return at any hint of enmity to his boyhood rudeness, she now paid him no heed. Some time or other, she reasoned, Edward would have enough of the fellow. At night kneeling by her bed in her old-fashioned cotton nightgown, her feet cold upon the bare floor of her virginal room, she prayed for the time to come soon.

Edward looked up from his desk, his dark eyes cold. "Well?"

"I'd like a couple of thousand advance, Ed."

"You've had a couple of thousand," Edward replied, busy with papers.

Harrow sat down. "Come now, Ed—"

"I'm here."

"You know you stand to get rich off me."

"If I ever get your book."

"It's nearly done, I tell you."

"I haven't seen a page of it."

"God, what's the matter with you? I thought there'd be some life in this firm when the old man went."

"Plenty of life," Edward said. He did not look at Harrow.

"Well," Harrow cried with high impatience, "what you want me to do?"

"Finish your book."

There was a long pause in which Edward read carefully a proposed contract for Spanish rights in the book he had not seen.

"Is that final?" Harrow demanded.

"Wholly," Edward replied.

Harrow bounced from his chair and tore from the room. Two weeks later, during which time no one saw him, he came down Granite Mountain carrying a great bundle wrapped in brown paper. He threw it upon Edward's desk. "Here it is," he shouted. "Now cough up, will you?"

"You've upset the ink," Edward said. He touched a bell and Jane came to the door, looking grim. "Bring a cloth, Jane," he said.

She returned with the same grim look and mopped up the ink. Only when she had gone did Edward allow himself to turn to Harrow.

"Complete?" he asked.

"Not a page missing," Harrow declared. "Where's my two thousand dollars?"

Edward rejected prudence and to get rid of the man that he

might devour the book, he drew a checkbook from the drawer of his desk and knowing it madness he made it out for two thousand dollars. His balance was dangerously low, and if that for which he had gambled escaped him, he would have to mortgage his very home. For the first time he was glad that his father was dead.

All afternoon, the great heap of brown paper stood on the end of his desk. He did not dare to begin to read it here. He would not read it until tonight when the children were in bed and he and Margaret were alone. The dread of disappointment dried his very blood. He drank again and again from the water jug on the window and in half an hour was thirsty again. There was no one to keep him from glancing at the first pages and yet he would not have done so for any amount of money. How absurd, he told himself, to be in the power of one man and such a man as Harrow! He had no idea when he thought of publishing books that it would be a business so racking, so dangerous, so devastating. He prayed only that the book might be clearly good or bad. Then he could make his decision. If it were mildly good and not too bad the agony of the present would stretch into months and even years. Let it be good or bad! He was ashamed as a decent Christian to address God with so personal a plea, surely petty in view of the enormous problems now in the world after the war, and yet in his heart he did murmur these words. Immediately they became ridiculous since in fact the book was already finished, it was what it would be, and not even God could do anything about it. He set himself to work doggedly until six o'clock as usual, pausing only to call Baynes in New York by telephone.

"Baynes, that you? I just wanted to say that Harrow has handed in the manuscript. I'm reading it tonight."

Baynes gave a cry of anguish. "Call me at dawn, will you?"

"No, I won't. But I ought to have some sort of notion tomorrow morning when I come to the office."

"I shan't sleep a wink," Baynes declared.

"Maybe I won't, either," Edward replied and hung up.

It had taken all his self-control not to hurry the evening for the children. With rigorous discipline he had compelled himself to conversation through dinner, to ten minutes of nursery rhymes for Sandy and to the reading aloud of *The Swiss Family Robinson*, which he had undertaken as part of the winter's reading for Mary and Tommy. He had said to Margaret in what he hoped was his usual voice, "I shall be up late tonight—Harrow brought me his complete manuscript today."

Interminably the evening wore on, the children were prepared for bed, and he went up to hear their prayers. A vague sense of hypocrisy always troubled him when he saw their innocent faith. He no longer prayed in exact words, and yet he felt that religion was decent and right, an essential in an honest man's life, however expressed. Prayer was a part of religion, he reasoned, and children should be taught its use, without being promised definite returns. Tonight he tried gently to persuade Mary not to pray for a bicycle, since he had no idea of buying it for her. He did not like to see women cycle. It thickened their legs and destroyed their delicacy. When Tommy prayed for an air rifle for his birthday, however, he considered whether the boy was big enough for it and decided that he was. Some discrepancy between his decisions for his daughter and for his son disturbed him, until it struck him that perhaps God Himself was thus compelled to decide between His asking children. For some the gift was unwise; for others, it was possible. This might be the Reason behind the Inscrutable Wisdom.

The children were in bed at last, and with the pleasant comfort of knowing that he was a good father Edward went into his room and changed to his old blue dressing robe. When he went downstairs Margaret was already sitting by the fire in her favorite red velvet chair. She was making lace on a small frame, a task which she learned as a young girl one summer in France and which she declared was soothing to the nerves. He appreciated invariably the picture that she made, and he smiled at her as he drew up a side table and prepared for the hours ahead.

"Don't you want to read Lew's manuscript, too?" he inquired.

Margaret did not look up. "No, thank you, Ned. I'll wait until the book is printed." This she said with lack of interest which, in his eagerness, he did not notice.

He went into the hall and brought back the enormous parcel, and putting it on the floor at his feet he began to unwrap it, as he sat in his own chair opposite her. Between them the wood fire burned pleasantly under the marble mantelpiece. Looking up to meet Margaret's eyes, he found she had not lifted them from her lace.

"Next to various moments with you, my dear," he said, trying not to seem excited, "I suppose this is the most exciting moment of my life."

"Perhaps it is even the most exciting," she answered.

There was something of an edge in her voice which at another time he might have explored, but tonight he could not bear to be diverted.

"You know better than that," he retorted, and immediately he lifted the first chapters from the stack between his feet and began to read.

The scene was Chedbury. Harrow had used the very name. A scrawled note at the top of the first page said, "Call the town anything you like, in printing, but I had to write it what it is."

The book began with a small wretched boy in a meager house on the fringe of the prosperous little town, a boy whose father was a drunkard and whose mother was a laundress. Harrow had determined to write his life out, not only as it was, but in all its ramifications in a society that did not care how he lived and not too much whether he died, except that the townsfolk were reluctant to pay for too many paupers' funerals. Edward plunged into a Chedbury he had never known.

At eleven o'clock Margaret put her lace frame away into a rosewood sewing cabinet.

He looked up reluctantly. "Going to bed?"

"Yes, Ned."

She came over to him and bending she kissed his forehead. His hands were full of pages, and he could only throw back his head. "Kiss me properly, Margaret," he demanded.

She stooped again and kissed him on the lips. "When are you coming up, Ned?"

"I don't know, dear. I think I'll stay by this as long as I can."

"Why must you?"

"I've gambled too much and I must know if I'll win."

She looked down at him half wistfully, and he looked up at her, aware again of something not said between them, and yet again he could not bear to be drawn from the urgency of what he wanted to do.

"Good night, my love," he said.

"Good night, Ned," she replied.

For a moment he heard her step slowly mounting the stairs, and then he forgot her. He was back in Lewis Harrow's world again, a world which in strange subterranean fashion was also his own.

Hours later he put down the last page silently. He had finished the book. He had no doubts and yet he was full of doubt. He had gambled and he had won. Lewis Harrow had written a great book. Haslatt Brothers could build upon a foundation as solid as Granite Mountain itself. Money would continue to flow from the book for Harrow as long as he lived, and for Edward and his family as well. Upon the profits of this treasure Edward foresaw the delight of publishing other books which he might like but which could not possibly pay—a book, for example, upon the varieties of printing types, their history, and their use, a book for the makers of books and not for the writers.

This was his first thought when he had laid down that last page. The fire on his hearth was a heap of ashes, and every voice in his house was stilled in sleep. He alone was awake and knowing, his exhausted mind alive with unnatural awareness. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. The book was cruel, of course. It

spared nothing and no one—not even the lean ferocious boy who had grown up, in Harrow's imagination, to be a man greatly rich through the making of steel. Why had he chosen steel? The man loved steel for its purity and its hardness. Harrow had put some love of his own into the symbol. But there were pages of human love, and these were the pages that frightened Edward. The variety was exciting and shameful, and then in the end came one so tender and so exquisite that it did not seem Harrow could know such love. He began to be afraid of the man. Ribaldry and physical lust he took for granted in him, but where had he got this power for tender worship of a woman remote to him?

Now deep doubt came flooding darkly into Edward's solitary mind. There was no possibility of concealment. He recognized the truth too well. The woman who had called forth this sweetness out of a man powerful and crude was one fashioned into an image he well knew, and it was the image of his own wife.

Some time later, having fumbled the pages together and tied the brown paper parcel as it had been, he got up and put out the lights and went upstairs. On all other nights he was used to stealing into Margaret's room and at least looking at her before he slept. But to-night he did not go in. The door between was ajar as she had left it, and he closed it noiselessly and prepared for bed. He saw from the small clock on his table that it was nearly five o'clock, and his blood was beating in his veins with weariness. He would not be able to sleep, he told himself. Yet his mind was unable to think. He lay numb under the covers and felt the night wind blow upon him from the open window. Then the numbness penetrated him like a drug, and postponing his fears, he slept in spite of himself.

He woke late in the morning. The sun shone whitely into his south window and he saw a rim of snow. In the night then it had snowed. There was a heap of snow upon the window sill. He started up and looked at his watch—nine o'clock. The house was silent about him. The children were already at school, and Marga-

ret must have breakfasted. He heard Sandy's voice now upon the stairs and Margaret's hush.

Then he remembered. He lay back, quite still. Harrow had had the audacity to use the very woman Margaret was, her soft dark hair, her sea-blue eyes, her slenderness and height, even the shape of her hands and her high-arched feet. He had dared to imagine the shape of her breasts, her waist, her thighs.

Intolerable doubt! Edward rose from his bed and stirred with unusual noisiness about his room.

"Papa got up!" he heard his little daughter's voice cry out, and a moment later Margaret tapped upon the door and came in. He was shaving and he kissed her lightly.

"You should have waked me," he grumbled.

"I wouldn't have done it for money," she retorted. "You look a ghost, Ned."

"I'm all right."

He continued to scrape his rather long chin while she stood waiting. When he did not speak she could refrain no more.

"How was the book?"

"Absolutely first rate."

"Was it?"

"Yes."

"Then, Ned—"

"Yes?"

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. Well, maybe—I guess he's taken the hide off some of us Chedbury folk, and I'm worried—a little."

"Oh, he's stupid!"

"No, he isn't—he's too smart. Anybody stupid would have changed things so no one would know. He's so smart he's dared say all he wanted to say."

"I don't think I'm going to read it."

"You'll have to someday, Margaret."

She looked at him curiously, and he fancied a reflection of his

own doubt in her watching eyes. When their eyes met and clung it was she who looked away. "Don't worry, Ned. And come down—your breakfast is waiting."

She went away with her brisk wifely step, so much the woman he had known since the day of his marriage that he felt assuaged. Then the damnable quality of Harrow's book occurred to him again. There the woman's husband, who had possessed her so long, did not know her at all. The man did not know, dull fellow, that worship was his wife's due, and that in such worship he would have found his own delight. Edward longed upon a strange and sudden impulse to rush downstairs and find Margaret wherever she was and cry out to her, crushed in his arms, "There is no one who could possibly love you as I do!" His natural shyness moved to restrain such monstrous revelation. She would look surprised, she would open her eyes wide. She might even laugh.

He went on with his dressing, more than a little angry at his predicament. Here on a morning when he should be filled only with relief and satisfaction at his own good fortune, when he should have been distracted by nothing that could check his energy, he felt depressed and doubtful. He distrusted his imagination, disturbed by the workings of something so insubstantial as Lewis Harrow's own. What matter if the fellow was attracted to Margaret? Men could be thus attracted to a delicately bred woman, especially lawless lowbred fellows, and it did not mean that the woman even knew it. He was insulting her by his doubts. It would be only decent to keep them to himself, certainly for the present.

Comforted by the righteousness of delay, he chose a somber gray tie that did not lighten in the least his dark suit, and feeling arrayed to fit his mood he went downstairs and ate his morning meal. Margaret sat in her place, and though she had eaten, she poured his coffee and supervised the prattle and play of Sandy, who had built some blocks into a structure in the corner. The uniformity of his outward surroundings was deeply comforting. The day was like any other day, and that was what he wanted. He

looked at Margaret and she smiled. Certainly she did not know what Harrow had done, and he would not tell her.

An hour later he was further comforted by the everyday appearance of his office. Jane was accustomedly cross when he came in late. "I don't know when you're going to get your letters done," she remarked when he had sat down in his swivel desk chair. The snow was melting and dripping down the windowpanes, and he could hear the whir of machinery as he opened the door.

"I want to talk to Baynes first," he said. "The letters will have to wait."

The telephone operator was in a good mood, the hour fortunate, and in a very few moments he was calling through to New York.

"That you, Baynes?"

"Yes."

"Well, aren't you going to ask me?"

"No. Aren't you going to tell me?"

Edward laughed. He had not the heart to continue the cruelty of teasing his younger brother. "Well, all we wanted it to be—it is."

"You mean—"

"Yes, I do. He's done something even bigger than the first one."

"Oh, holy cats!"

"It's too long, but I don't know how to shorten it by a word. There is a scene or two, an episode, I could take out altogether."

His smoldering doubt suddenly leaped into suggestion. Why should he not complain of the length to Harrow and insist that the pages—he could remember them even now—the pages between four hundred and twenty-five and five hundred be eliminated? After all, the woman had come in at the very end of the book unheralded except for the desire that had sought her around the world. He spoke to Baynes again.

"Yes, I think I may insist on a few cuts—only one of any importance. But there's nothing to hold us up. I'll want to see the

artist myself for the jacket drawing. It ought to be a scene—something like the one I am looking at this very minute out of my office window, the green sloping up to the church and the Seaton house in the foreground, the firehouse, of course, and the store, maybe a snow scene. By the way, we had snow last night—very soft. We'll have to work hard and fast now, Baynes."

"Sandra thinks we ought to have a big dinner on the day of publication. Get all the critics together and so on."

"Whatever you like."

"You mean that?" Baynes demanded with excitement.

"For once, yes."

He hung up the receiver and sat for a moment staring upon the scene he was planning for the jacket. He ought to call Harrow, but there was no telephone to *The Eagle*. Harrow did not want one. There was nothing to do but wait until the fellow came down the mountain.

In a mood of arrested doubt and of genuine enjoyment he went into the printing shop. The presses rolling off the sheets of the books he had chosen for his firm gave him a pleasant sense of power. He, Edward Haslatt, here in his quiet, purposely old-fashioned office in a small town in an unimportant region of his country, could entice to himself living, thinking people from anywhere in the world, whose minds flamed and exploded into creation.

He had been proud to receive some weeks ago a thin manuscript of poems from a young man in a valley of the Cotswolds. A year ago he would not have dared to publish so risky a venture, but thanks to Lewis Harrow, he had accepted the poems as soon as he had read them and perceived their elements of emotion and pride. He paused beside the press, which was being run by John Carosi, and watched the wide margins, the thick cream paper imprinted in short black lines. He had chosen his latest text type, Poliphus, thick and warm, carrying the illusion of an ancient art. Was it, he pondered, suitable for the young poet? But like so many young, the lines of this poet, in spite of their originality, had echoed. Edward

had decided upon the book, not so much for what it was as for the implications of feeling and imagination which gave promise of future richness in the talent.

"Do you ever read any of the sheets you print?" he asked.

Carosi looked at him, surprised. Edward Haslatt did not often speak to the men he employed.

"I don't," he said curtly. "If I did, I couldn't tend the machine. Like as not the ink would be runny."

He bent his head, and Edward went on, pleased enough. He was printing books that were simple, too simple, perhaps, to be called fine. Yet there was elegance in their simplicity, and with elegance came good style. He pondered as he went back to his desk the answer that had been given him. For machines he himself cared nothing. He did not understand them. Cogs and wheels, he called them, and they were blind slaves formed only to give shape and permanence to the thoughts of men. He had grown far beyond his father, who had, he remembered, an actual tenderness for the machines he had bought with such careful economy. What was printed by them Mark Haslatt scarcely cared—advertisements, announcements of marriage and death, bills of sale, posters, and notices. Edward had inherited something from him, but it was fulfilled by a quality entirely his own. Machines were no more than means.

So ruminating, at ease because he had won, Edward circumvented the core of his inner unease. But when he opened the door to his office he felt a shock. Lewis Harrow sat in the swivel chair, his feet on the desk, and he was roaring with laughter into the telephone. He shouted as Edward came in, "I'll be there—to celebrate either my victory or my defeat. Here comes God! . . . Well," he said, and shambled to his feet.

"Don't get up," Edward said with acid courtesy.

"I had pins in my seat while I sat there," Harrow retorted. He dropped into the chair across the desk. "Out with it, Ed. Do you like my book?"

"How can I help it?" Edward asked. "You know as well as I do what you have done. It is wonderful and terrible. But it's too long."

"Now if you start meddling," Harrow began violently.

Edward held up his hand. "I want it seventy-five pages shorter."

Harrow leaped to his feet. "Give me the manuscript!"

"What for?"

"I'll take it to New York."

"Sit down, you fool," Edward said with patience. "I want you to take out the part about that last woman."

Harrow sat down, snarling. "You publish it as it is or you shan't have it."

"She doesn't add anything," Edward said stubbornly. "You had the book all written without her, and then you dragged her in."

Harrow groaned aloud. "If you'd just forget you aren't the author—" He leaned forward, his square blocked face red with swift anger. "Look here, Ed. Can't you see that it's implied—"

"What's implied?" Edward asked grimly.

"That she's changed his life by being inaccessible."

"Oh, she's inaccessible, is she?"

"Sure she is."

Against his better judgment, goaded by his living jealousy, Edward said, "How does he know what her body looks like?"

Harrow refused to accept the knowledge of what was going on in Edward's mind. "Don't you see that my man knows what women are? Out of the dozen and more women he's lived with, slept with, bought, loved—hasn't he learned something? Given a height, a shape, a narrow hand, flying black hair, blue eyes, a high-arched foot—can't he imagine?"

"It's obscene," Edward blurted.

There was a tight silence, then Harrow spoke. "You're obscene."

The silence fell again. Edward stared down at a little white elephant upon his desk, a desk toy Thomas Seaton had given him one Christmas, ivory weighted with lead.

"What's more," Harrow said suddenly, "you don't deserve her. Someday I shall tell her so."

He rose, flung on his shapeless hat, and strode out of the room.

And with him went all the joy of the great day. Edward sat motionless, leaning upon his desk, his hand shading his eyes. He could not endure the torment of his jealousy. It boiled up in him and he leaped to his feet and strode after Harrow and catching him in the outer hall he held him by the shoulder.

"Come back here and tell me what you mean! If it's what I think, you can take your filthy book with you."

He would have welcomed anger in return, so intolerable was his fury. Instead Harrow's strange tawny eyes were remote and calm.

"Sure I'll come back," he said. His voice showed only mild interest.

In the office again, however, the door closed, he looked at Edward with greedy curiosity. "I've never seen you angry before, Ed—it's quite a sight. A quiet man can really put on a show."

"It's not show." A chill came over him as he answered Harrow. He always shivered with cold when his anger drained away. He tried to moisten his lips but his mouth was dry.

"No, I see it isn't." Harrow's voice was musing. He sighed. "How I hate real life!"

Edward did not answer this. He found his pipe in his pocket and lit it, and looking up, saw that Harrow perceived that his hands were trembling.

"Men like you, Ed," Harrow said, "live only in real life. Men like me only use you, and your wives and your children, to write about real life."

"You'd better leave us alone."

"I might be of use to you, though, if you'll accept that of me." Harrow was stubbornly casual.

"Your usefulness is limited to business," Edward retorted and then winced at the pedantry of his words. Why could he not invest his voice with that silver-edged carelessness which sharpened the dullest words? He could not. He was solid, plodding maybe, but without veneer.

Harrow laughed and slapped the desk with his palms. "Ed, will you hear something from me?"

"Maybe."

"Maybe is must, then! You're a fool—that's first."

Edward, sitting now behind the desk, pulled hard on his pipe in lieu of answer. Harrow leaned on his elbows. "Second, if you'll let me go on, your wife, though beautiful, is impregnable. You don't deserve such luck."

"I'd rather you didn't speak of her."

"Don't be such a fool, Ed! I will speak of her, do you hear?"

Harrow's face, so near his across the desk, grew harsh. It was an ugly face, heavy featured, dark, lit only by light eyes and white teeth and changing expression. Eyes and teeth gleamed at him now.

"Of course I'd have been glad to win her away from you. What have you done to deserve her? Can you even appreciate what she is? I doubt it!"

"Stop!" His voice roared at Harrow, strange in his own ears. "You haven't the least idea of the—the relationship between my—my wife and myself. You—you—it takes years to build what we have—and a sort of devotion that you have no notion of."

He was on his feet, shouting at Harrow. His pipe dropped to the floor and a coal of tobacco fell on the carpet and began to burn a hole. He stamped on it and looking down for the moment he heard Harrow laugh softly.

"Don't I know it, man?" Harrow's voice came softly over the desk. "That's why she's impregnable. With all your manifold

faults, every one of which you may be sure she sees, she knows what she has and she'll never let herself escape from it. She's accepted the prison of your love."

"It's not a prison."

"Sometimes it is," Harrow insisted. "But most of the time it's a walled garden, and every day she throws away the key to the gate, so she'll never yield to temptations."

"Is she ever—" He could not bring out the word.

"Tempted?" Harrow's voice was delicately cheerful. "Of course she is. Who isn't?"

"I'm not."

"That's the wall around the garden. She knows you, Ed. Take heart from that. It isn't every man who can be known through and through and have his wife value him the more."

A strange reverence crept into Harrow's bantering. "Why, Ed, you're a fool not to live your life in joy. You do possess your wife. Do you know how few men can say that and know it's true? You're cursed with humility."

"Only because she's too good for me, of course." Edward ground out these words from the tightness of his heart cursing Harrow for his searching shrewdness.

"She's not too good for you," Harrow retorted. "No woman can be too good for what you give your wife."

His eyes fell on his wrist watch and he leaped to his feet. "I have to catch a train in ten minutes—promised I'd be in New York."

He caught up his hat and ran out, banging the door. Alone Edward sat without moving. He felt spent, not being used, he supposed, to release of emotions. For a moment he could not collect himself. Then there came creeping into his veins a warmth of transfusion. He remembered again what Harrow had said. Margaret, his wife, was impregnable. His love kept her inviolate. Then she knew how he loved her. He had never been able to tell her entirely, but she knew.

His comfort was short. For how did Harrow know even this

about her unless he had had most intimate talk with Margaret? What had they said? How much had Margaret revealed and why? Harrow would henceforward be an unwanted third in their most secret life.

He heard the door open but he did not look up.

"You ready to answer your letters?" Jane's voice inquired.

"No."

She shut the door, and he continued to sit. The clock in the outer office struck twelve, and there was a stir of clerks getting ready to go to lunch. Jane must have told them he did not want to be disturbed, for no one came in his door. He sat another hour, breaking his despair and doubt occasionally to fumble with papers, to read a letter or two, to realize that he did not understand anything except the growing demand of his own heart to know the truth from Margaret herself. While he had been engrossed in these offices, intent upon the making of books and selling them, where had Harrow been? What had he been doing when for weeks he had delayed finishing his book, and why, when he finished it so swiftly, had it been to bring into those pages—Margaret?

There was no truth to be had whole out of Lewis Harrow. That man who so impudently comprehended what went on inside human creatures really could understand nothing. What could he know, and how could he know, what it meant to a man to be as he, Edward Haslatt, was a man, firm in integrity, a faithful husband, a good father, a leading citizen whom all respected? Lewis Harrow, knowing everything, his fertile imagination a ferret running into the secret places of lives with which he could have nothing to do, had crept sniffing and sucking into the precious privacy of a house whose doors he was not fit to enter.

But the truth could be had from Margaret. This dawned upon Edward at last with fainting hope. Margaret had never lied to him. She would not lie to him now. He got to his feet, reached for his hat and coat, and left his office. Seeing his grim face, no one spoke to him as he passed, not even Jane.

His house was silent as he let himself in the front door. The children were not yet home from school and Sandy was deep in her afternoon nap. He hung up his hat and coat and looked into the living room. Margaret was not there. For a moment his jealousy leaped to the possibility that she was out, even now, perhaps, with Harrow. The fellow might have run to tell her about the talk interchanged at the office. She might be meeting him somewhere, even perhaps in New York. More than once Margaret had gone abruptly to the city, leaving only a note.

He checked firmly the rush of quivering fears. In common sense he must not go to her trembling and distraught. Profoundly feeling as she was, she shrank with physical distaste from emotionalism. Surface display she could not accept. He went into the library for a moment to collect himself, and found himself remembering instead the times, now long past, when his instinctive jealousy had first been roused. How long she had delayed in her decision to marry him! If she had loved him as he had loved her since he was seventeen years old, she could not so have delayed. She had said once that her father wanted her to marry someone in New York, a needless thing to tell him, surely, when the man was nothing to her, and there was the evening when he had first come to the Seaton house and she had worn a gown so low in the bosom that it had made him uncomfortable and they had quarreled. Then his unholy jealousy reached into the sacred hours of his honeymoon and his startled, half-guilty delight in the freedom with which she had dressed and undressed in his presence, a lack of modesty, beautiful and dangerous.

Actually she had grown more modest with the years. Without words they had come to behave with graceful courtesy that, he had imagined until now, did not separate them in the least. He did not open her door without knocking—he had not done so since Sandra was born. And she did not come in when he was bathing. It had been their joy to have no walls of privacy when they were first married, but they had built them again, bit by bit, walls no

stronger than mist, transparent and yet shielding. Had those walls provided her with secrecy?

For she had changed. The old frank abruptness with which she had once spoken her thoughts, asserting her right to wound him if she must because in love there must be truth—this frankness she no longer had. A silvery gentleness now enclosed her, and he was startled to realize how long it had been since they had really spoken with communication.

At this moment he heard a door open and close, and with an impetuosity entirely foreign to him he leaped to his feet and ran upstairs and knocked at the door of her room.

She was there. He did not know, as he stood staring at her, that in his relief his face began to work as if with tears. She had just taken from her closet a garment of some sort. Evidently she had been resting, for the bed was tumbled and she wore a negligee.

"You aren't sick?" he gasped.

"No—only tired. I thought I'd rest while Sandy slept. Why, Ned, what's the matter?"

"Nothing." He sank down into her velvet armchair.

"Don't be silly, Ned. You look dreadful."

He was speechless. Now that he saw her standing there in her rose dressing gown, looking exactly as she did every morning, her dark hair curling about her face, her eyes calm as the sea under sunshine, he felt his heart swell and his breath grow short. He tried to smile and looked so ghastly that she dropped the garment she held and fell on her knees at his side.

"Ned, speak to me, do you hear? Tell me what it is."

His heart kept swelling until he could not get his breath, and to his horror he heard a loud sob. It was his own.

At this she, who had never seen him weep, began suddenly to weep herself. "Oh, darling, what is it? Don't keep it to yourself, dear. Is it the business? Has something dreadful happened? It isn't Tommy—or Mary?"

Her terror gave him strength, and he lifted her into his lap. "No, no—it's too foolish. You won't forgive me."

"But I'd forgive you anything." Her head was upon his shoulder and he felt her cheek wet.

"Would you, Margaret—will you?"

"Of course—I promise. No, I don't have to promise—you know. Oh, Ned, you frighten me."

"Well, then, listen."

And then, holding her head with his cheek upon her hair so that she could not see his face, he told her of his doubt and his jealousy, and she listened. But he would not tell her of what Harrow had said.

If she had grown angry with him, if her body had stiffened as she lay silent in his arms, he would have been reassured. If she had flown at him with some of the impetuous heat of her girlhood, which now so seldom she did, he would have been reassured. But she lay soft and yielding in his arms. She kept her eyes shut—he felt the lashes curling motionless under his chin. Her hand lay in his, and he imagined only a quickening in the beating of her heart as she lay against him. So there was no way for him to know the truth except to ask for it, and having revealed himself naked to the soul in all his folly of love, he did ask.

"I don't want you to be afraid of me, Margaret. I don't want my love to be a prison. Tell me the truth. If Harrow has made love to you—"

Her voice when she spoke was soft and tired. "Is that it? But it doesn't matter if men make love."

"Then he has?"

"He's the sort that will always keep on trying."

"But you don't—"

"Let him, you mean? Of course not, Ned." She sighed when she had said these words, and still she lay in his arms, soft and inert.

"It doesn't mean anything to me what he does, Ned. Only—"

"Only what, dear heart?"

"Are you angry with me?"

"No—but terribly afraid."

"Are you satisfied with me?"

"Absolutely."

Upon this she sat up and faced him, her blue eyes sparkling with sudden anger. "How can you be satisfied with me, Ned, when you don't have anything to say to me, when you aren't with me, when you don't bother to find out anything about me, when you can even suspect me of—of listening to Lew Harrow?" She burst into fresh weeping.

He was so comforted by her anger, so reassured by her fury, so assuaged by her tears, that he could have laughed. He hugged her to him by force, and when she pushed him with her hands against his breast he would not let her loose herself from him.

"Are you satisfied with me?" he demanded.

"No," she sobbed. "No, no, no!"

"Now," he said firmly, "now we have something to talk about. Stop crying and tell me what's wrong. Stop, I say!"

He forced her to look at him, her face still streaming with tears, and he shook her as if she were a child. "I haven't kept my promise to you—isn't that what you're thinking?"

She nodded.

"I've forgotten—or I've been too busy, it's the same thing—to make our marriage the most important thing in my life—isn't that what you're thinking?"

"Yes," she whispered. "It's true. That's exactly what you've done."

"And what you've done," he retorted, "is to let me go on, year after year—"

"Because I thought you wanted to."

"Understanding me so little," he accused her sternly.

"Understanding you very well," she retorted, "but not knowing how to change you—unless you wanted yourself to change. How did I know you weren't tired of me? Men do outgrow their wives. But I'm so used to you now, I can't live except with you."

He groaned. "Oh, Margaret, Margaret, what folly for us!"

"Is it really, Ned?" Her voice and eyes were wistful.

"Why are you humble?" he demanded. "You used never to be humble."

"I think marriage makes women humble," she said, half sadly, "just as it makes men arrogant."

"Nonsense. Your father and mother never were either."

"Ah, but they've never been really married—as we are."

"Take my parents, then."

"They were both humble," she said wisely. "Marriage wasn't good for them—not their marriage."

They fell silent for a moment, each thinking separate thoughts. Marriage, which had made them one, had begun to build a wall between them, had separated them, too, so Edward mused. The necessity to earn a living for them all, the necessity to be father, and she perhaps, with the necessity to be mother—and yet surely somehow this was the proper course of marriage?

"It looks to me as if we'd have to begin over," he said at last. "Maybe it's only second wind we need. Or maybe we need to design our marriage again to what we are now—the man and woman we've become."

Her tears had dried and she smiled. "I do love you." She murmured the words against his lips.

He received them far more solemnly indeed than the first time she had uttered them so long ago, and doubt and jealousy left him suddenly and forever.

"Do you, dear?" If there was less passion in his voice than there had been in his youth, there was tenderness that reached from the bottom of the sea to heaven. "I love you, too, and I want to promise you again, Margaret—"

She laughed with astonishing joy, as though ten minutes ago she had not wept her heart half broken. "Oh, promises," she cried richly, "as if we needed them any more!"

She got up out of his lap and pushed back her tumbled hair.

"What on earth have we been talking about?" she demanded.

"Something important," he retorted.

"Maybe," she said in a practical voice, and began to brush her hair.

He did not reply to this, but sat watching her, a half smile on his lips. It had been something very important indeed. For the rest of his life he would be a different man.

III



CHRISTMAS EVE, of the forty-fifth year of Edward Haslatt's life, was a fine one. He had risen in the morning to see Chedbury deep under snow. Over the edge of the hill behind the spire of the church a crimson sun shone in a clear sky. He had a feeling of profound pleasure. Christmas was beginning just as it should. By night his children would be gathered under his roof and his house would be full. His mother and his sister Louise were coming for dinner, and later in the evening their usual Christmas dance would take place. This was also a celebration of his own wedding anniversary. He and Margaret had long ago given up trying to make a private affair out of it, and there were times when his marriage seemed a family rather than a personal matter.

Dallying over his dressing for breakfast, Edward reviewed the recent years. His wedding anniversary always induced reminiscence. The difficult quarrel which he and Margaret had carried through over Harrow's novel remained firm in his memory. Harrow had been damnably right, of course; nevertheless Edward did not like to be indebted for understanding his own wife. Yet he was indebted. In the privacy of his own room and the gloomier hours of night he had read many times Harrow's novel, dwelling always upon the pages where the blue-eyed black-haired woman entered suddenly upon the scene. With each reading he lashed his always ready conscience. Margaret had never blamed him again for neglect.

The novel had been one of the miracles of publishing but he had

no wish to repeat it. After his conversation with Harrow about the unwanted episode, which Harrow firmly refused to take out, Edward had referred to it no more. He had even succeeded in removing it from his own thoughts. With grimness he proceeded to make the book a masterful success, maintaining a cold face toward an angry Chedbury when it recognized some of its weaknesses skillfully painted upon the characters in Harrow's novel. "If I can lump it they can," Edward told himself in the deep and secret places of his own being.

He sat in his office, the control room of an enterprise that grew so vast that there were times when he himself was terrified at what he, by the grace of Harrow, had achieved. His presses rolled off the editions, and he was compelled to dangerous postponement of all other business. Even so he could not print enough copies of the book which critics, generous and loud in their praise of new genius, insisted was to be read by every thinking American. People rushed to join the ranks of the thoughtful, and Harrow's book was on every living-room table, when any book was, and upon the surge of popular demand Edward made his first motion picture sale.

His life had been upset and his digestion weakened by the constant demand from Baynes and Sandra that he be present at cocktail parties and dinners in big cities, until the press of work increased the necessity that he stay at his desk. All the furor Harrow enjoyed without apparent damage. He ate at all hours, drank prodigiously, and slept, he declared, on his feet.

Edward watched the bank deposits of his firm rise to comforting figures, and felt for once no pricks from his tender conscience, for Harrow's profits were even greater. In these days, though Edward came and went with his accustomed modesty, Chedbury observed a new confidence in him. He was now a soundly successful man.

He had been staggered, however, one Monday morning when little Mrs. Walters killed herself. No one expected it. She had

read the book bravely, ignoring to her closest friends the clearly drawn portrait of her husband, dead so many years ago. She had even come to Edward after church the Sunday before and among Chedbury folk, standing about in the sunshine of the green she had chirped, "I think *Town Square* is simply wonderful!"

"It is a great book, though a harsh one," Edward had replied. "Perhaps Harrow will mellow with years," he had added, after looking down into Mrs. Walters' white wrinkled little face.

"Oh, of course he will!" she had trilled.

That night she had taken the shocking overdose of sleeping pills, and Edward had understood with grateful pity that her courage of the day before had perhaps been in preparation and apology.

He had weathered with outward calm the bitter and even angry surmises of Chedbury, and prudently he had sent only a modest offering of flowers to the bier. Anything more would have been construed by Chedbury as the expression of a guilty conscience. To Harrow, however, he spoke privately and forcibly.

"You see what happens when you tamper with real life."

Harrow had shrugged his heavy shoulders. "How little you understand people, Ed! If she hadn't wanted to die she wouldn't have killed herself. I gave her the excuse, that's all. I'm sure she was grateful."

He stared across the room with eyes so remote and all-seeing that Edward had said no more. That night, however, he told Margaret what Harrow had said to him. They had sat late after the children went to bed, and then before going upstairs themselves they had taken a turn or two in the garden, arm in arm.

"A queer thing to say, wasn't it?" he had remarked.

"Yes," Margaret had replied, "and yet like so many things Lew says, it can't be denied because perhaps it's true."

He digested this remark in silence, admitting its accuracy. The wind had blown cool as they reached the far end of the garden, and so they had gone in.



As though the death of old Mrs. Walters had been relief enough for anger, Chedbury relapsed into its usual somnolence after the funeral, and Harrow went on with energy to finish his monstrous house on Granite Mountain and to plunge into his next novel.

Edward conceded in his more melancholy moods that while Haslatt Brothers were highly respectable publishers they were not spectacular, except for Lewis Harrow's books. Two or three lesser successes, produced by discoveries of Baynes and Sandra, had barely enabled him to maintain his independence before Harrow. There had been nothing further between them of personal matter, and Edward subdued his continuing annoyance at the easy way in which Harrow came and went in this house. Except for the weeks and months of fierce concentration, when Harrow lived aloof and alone on Granite Mountain, there was nothing sacred. For the last week Harrow had been incessantly present and busy about the Christmas party.

To this party all the young people of Chedbury came, together with out-of-town friends the children had made at their various schools, and such business connections as Baynes and Sandra felt were inevitable.

Whether old Thomas Seaton could get here tonight was questionable, if the snow held under this sun. He had grown very shaky in his seventy-seventh year. Mrs. Seaton was as hard as a nut. The fragility that had once been her charm had become sinewy and sinister.

Edward pondered the determination of women to outlast men. Would his own Margaret one day linger long after he was underground? To this melancholy question he found no answer as he continued to dress, listening meanwhile for the voice of Mark, his youngest, born to his astonishment and Margaret's laughter, three years ago. He would never forget his alarm when Margaret came to him and told him she was pregnant, after so many years.

"We should never have gone to Italy," he had said solemnly.

"Why do you blame Italy?" Margaret had demanded.

"You know very well what I mean," he had retorted.

For that year Sandy had been put into boarding school, and he and Margaret had gone to Europe once more. In a manner of speaking, it was a second honeymoon, although neither of them had put the idea into words. He had rejoiced that again he had her to himself, her thoughts to be directed to him alone as they had been in the days when they were newly married. This had not quite come about. The children existed for them both, and even at times when they were most intimately close, as they had been, for example, that night in Venice, he saw a faraway look stealing into her eyes, which meant that she was wondering about the children. Once having given birth to a child, a woman seemed to be forever divided. It had taken him a long time to learn this, and still longer to accept its inevitability.

That night in Venice he remembered in absurdly idyllic circumstances—that is, a moon had risen over St. Mark's and the water in the canal upon which they were riding in a gondola, though actually filthy, was changed into liquid gold. The Italian fellow who was rowing them began to sing a soft shaking melody and his tenor voice, though untrained, had a surprising quality of sweetness. Margaret sitting beside him on the narrow benchlike seat looked like a girl. She had put chiffon or something over her head, and her face was absolutely beautiful. Edward had wanted to make love to her immediately, and in an hour or two he had suggested that they go back to the hotel. She had not wished to go, and this had irritated him. Surely she understood his state of mind, and surely she might have responded to it. He earnestly longed to abandon himself to romantic love. It was not often that he felt he could. That night, far from Chedbury, with no business problems pressing and the children cared for, he had felt entitled to what might be called relaxation. A man of more common clay would have found it in various repulsive ways, but he had turned to his wife.

"Oh, let's enjoy the night as long as we can," Margaret had said, rebelliously.

"You don't enjoy being with me, I suppose," he had retorted. Of course she knew very well what he was feeling.

"We may never see Venice again as long as we live." This was her reply. It was made to remind him of a quarrel they had had once in Kansas. It had been her first journey westward, and her excitement, as tonight, had made her more than usually beautiful. She had gazed at the rising plains over which they were motor-ing. "It's more lovely than the sea," she had murmured, "because it doesn't change." So beautiful had she been that day, her cheeks sunburned red and her black hair flying, that he had wanted love from her. She had yielded unwillingly, as he had found out only long afterward, because she did not want to hurt him. Nor had this wish to spare him been an unselfish one. She admitted, when he pressed her, that she did not want to have the trouble of a quarrel. Upon this they had quarreled indeed. He had not forgotten the tortuous admissions he had wrung from her.

"You, who insisted that you would marry me only if we could be frank," he had reminded her again. "I am frank enough, but what about you?"

She had been cool and patient. "You make it impossible for me to be frank," she had declared. "If I don't feel just as you do, and when you do, you feel it is my fault. I lie to save myself trouble."

He had refused to acknowledge the possibility of truth in this nonsense, but he knew there was truth in it, though only a wisp, and knew, too, that she was aware of having said something telling. He had made honest efforts, ever afterward, to examine her mood, before indulging his own.

But she had held the Kansas afternoon against him, as he came to know, because while she wanted to be free to enjoy the world through which she passed, he had forced her, because she did not want to hurt him, to center her attention on him. She had never quite forgiven him, nor in a sense had he forgiven her, while he had learned to accept rationally the difference between them,

which was that when he was moved by extraordinary experience or pleasure, his impulse was to find release and expression in his love for her. She, he now knew, wanted at such times to be free of him and of love, in order that she might lose herself—and perhaps, him.

For long this difference between them had wounded him deeply, but with the years he had come to believe that it was the difference not only between himself and Margaret, but also between man and woman, and therefore to be accepted.

That night in Venice, with the memory of Kansas alive in him, he had controlled his desire, had sat only holding her hand lightly, had allowed her to wander into dreams she did not share with him, until suddenly long after midnight she had turned to him, her eyes dark.

"Now," she had whispered, "now I am ready."

The outcome of that rewarding night, he was firmly convinced, had been his unexpected son, Mark.

What they would have done without him it was of course impossible now to imagine. A child who upset all their accustomed ways, no less inconvenient to the older children than to himself and Margaret, spoiled as he had become in his irrepressible youth and gaiety, he was a darling headache, as Sandy put it, wherever they took him. Edward adored him privately above all his other children. Some day, he secretly believed, Mark would be the joy of his old age and the mainstay of the business. Baynes had no children and was not likely to have any. Tommy, although now a gangling youth, still showed no interest in anything except football and the curious moaning noises which passed for singing these days. But Mark, even at three, was trying to learn to read. Further than this, Edward tried not to be proud of the fact that, of all his children, only Mark looked like him. So real was the resemblance that there were times when Edward had the illusion that he was looking into his own childish face as he used to remember it, somewhat older than Mark's, in the mirror in his old

bedroom. His mother made no pretense that Mark was not her favorite grandchild.

Edward was dressing very slowly, feeling no hurry this morning before Christmas. During the holiday week he tried not to work, if possible, at his usual tasks. He had put on scarcely more than six pounds as he grew older, but Dr. Wynne had warned him of a blood pressure some ten years too old for him. Nothing dangerous, but still it was a barometer. Now he heard a tap on his door.

"Come in," he called, knowing that light metallic sound. Margaret came in, dressed in a new crimson wool dress which struck his eye at once.

"Not too red, is it?" he asked cautiously.

"Is it?" she demanded.

"The skirt's short," he suggested.

"Oh, you!" she said with affectionate humor. "You wouldn't be satisfied unless I went around in some sort of purdah. For heaven's sake, Ned, be your age!"

"I wish you'd be yours," he retorted with good spirit.

Whether it was her slightly graying hair, which made her skin look as fresh as ever, or whether it was the undying blue of her eyes, he did not know, but she had grown more handsome with years. What had been angular and impetuous in her young face had grown smooth and tempered. She had not quite fulfilled his secret longing for moments of high romance, but he did not blame her entirely for that, knowing that to the ordinary eye he was not wholly a romantic figure. His face, as he now looked at it in the mirror while he knotted his brown satin tie, was long and dark. His hair was growing heavily gray and his rather large mouth had taken on a dry and saturnine look, which he did not understand, for he was at heart a shy and still too sensitive man. The last thing Jane Hobbs had said to him one day, now five years ago, when she made ready to walk out of the office for the last time, was, "Now that I'm to be gone for at least a month, do for mercy's sake

watch yourself, Ed, and don't give money to anybuddy you don't know."

Poor Jane—none of them had thought she would not be back. She had gone to the hospital for some female operation into whose details he did not inquire, the sort of thing he understood that the wombs of old virgins were liable to develop, and she had not survived the operation that was to make her life better. Perhaps it was better anyway. Who knew? Joseph Barclay with all his sermons had never been able to convince him that there was any sort of real life after the grave. He would not speak this doubt as long as his mother lived, for she had at best too short a time left to her in which to hope to see her husband again. With each year since his father's death, the silence growing deeper as the very memory of his voice was forgotten, his mother was able to remember only his virtues, those good qualities that had appeared so scanty in life. Perhaps the physical awkwardness, the small repulsive habits that his father had never tried to overcome, had died with him, leaving his true image clear. Death had performed a service.

"Well," Margaret said restlessly. "I suppose you'll be down to breakfast when you're ready."

"Aren't you going to kiss me this morning?" he demanded.

She moved to him and their lips met with the ease of long habit. She had taken to wearing lipstick, to his private annoyance, but he had given up protest. She wore it very well, of course, just the slightest tinge and not the solid scarlet that Sandra plastered on her mouth, already somewhat too coarse. But still it was enough so that he had to bother to wipe it off, lest one of his children jeer at him.

"At it again, you two!" Sandy had cried the last time she was home from school, when she saw the stain of red on his chin. Young people these days were purposely ribald.

And yet, he thought, as Margaret's lips met his, this kiss was better than ever. Some of the old sting and novelty perhaps were

gone, but the present satisfaction was deeper than he could possibly have felt in his youth. He had still not plumbed all her womanhood. She changed all the time, and he had to keep up with the change. Take, for example, her willfulness about working for these foreign peoples—what on earth did they have to do with Chedbury? Except that he did not like the look of things in the world at that! Even when they had been in Europe there was already some sort of shadow creeping over Denmark and Holland. He didn't see it in Italy or in Germany. Everything there was buoyant and the people were full of hope.

"Germany is about to rise to the height of her nationhood," Heinrich Mundt, the German publisher, had declared.

"What on earth are you thinking about?" Margaret now demanded. "Not about me."

"It comes of my not having to rush to the office," he confessed.

"What's the use of kissing me if you don't keep your mind on it?" she said and shook him a little and went away.

A rumble at the front door, a slam, and then a loud shouting voice roaring through the house announced the arrival of Lewis Harrow. A moment later the fellow was bellowing up the stairs.

"Ain't you up yet, Ed?"

Lewis affected these days a return to the speech of lower Chedbury, declaring that it was the sort of English he had learned as a child and anything later acquired was pretense. He had never married, and for all these years had continued to live alone at The Eagle, except for long journeys into various parts of the world, in no one knew what company.

Edward opened his door. "Just coming," he said crisply and closed it again. A hoarse growling, as of bears, mingled with shrieks, told him that Mark had rushed out of the kitchen to find his beloved. Strange that nowadays because of the child's joy he should be slightly jealous again of Lewis Harrow! Old roots yielded reluctantly.

He went downstairs wearing, as symbol of holiday, the red vel-

vet jacket that Margaret had given him last Christmas. Lewis Harrow, in shabby tweeds, one elbow ragged, gazed at him as at an apparition. "My God, how handsome you are!" he cried and pretended rude amazement.

Edward smiled. "Thank you," he said with composure. "Have you had breakfast?"

He was pleased to see his small son, wearing a blue sailor suit and his breakfast bib, desert Lewis and come flying with outstretched arms. He picked Mark up and carried him into the dining room and put him into the highchair before he took his own seat.

"I had breakfast before dawn," Lewis shouted, following him into the dining room.

"Foolish of you," Edward remarked. "What have you come here so early for—money?"

Their friendship now was past the possibility of breaking, although twice Lewis had quarreled with him and had gone to other publishers and twice Edward had let him go, knowing grimly that no man could bring him the fortune that Lewis did yearly. Twice Lewis Harrow had come back, complaining and angry. "You're all a lot of thieves, you publishers," he had cried. "I've a good mind to start printing my own books."

"Perhaps you had better," Edward agreed, "then you'll see where the profits go. If you have a thousand dollars left I'll be surprised."

"Shut up and draw a contract for the best book I've written yet," Lewis had ordered. "'Member that mulatto fellow I told you about last year? I've written a book about him."

"People don't want to read about mulattoes," Edward had complained.

People had, however, read *Pedro and the Public*. It had not been one of Harrow's big books. The critics had been narrow-minded, but plenty of people had read it with joy. It was Harrow's strength that people read him whatever the critics said.

"I don't want any of your filthy money," Lewis now retorted and then corrected himself. "My filthy money, rather. Of course your little shop would go out of business if it weren't for me."

"I did very well when you were fooling around with city men," Edward replied mildly, and fell with appetite to scrambled eggs and bacon.

Lewis stared at him. "My God, look at him eat! It's these rails of men who lay away the grub."

"What did you come for?" Edward asked. "I know you don't climb down Granite on a snowy morning just to watch me eat."

Lifting a forkful of egg at this moment, Edward observed a strange suffused look upon Harrow's face. It had never been a handsome face, and rugged and unaffected, it had changed little with years. Now it was blushing red.

"I came to find out what time Mary's train arrives," Lewis said.

"Why should you bother to meet Mary's train?" Edward inquired. Shades of old jealousy made him look away from Harrow.

"Bacon," Mark said succinctly.

Edward put a rasher on the child's plate.

"Maybe I want to talk about a Christmas present for you," Lewis said.

"Queer you get so red over a Christmas present for me," Edward retorted.

"More bacon," Mark said.

"Don't eat so fast," Edward told his son. "This is the last piece."

"Ain't you going to tell me the train?" Lewis inquired.

"What train?" Margaret asked coming at this moment into the room to find Mark. "Edward, he's already eaten his breakfast and had quantities of bacon."

"I told him this was the last piece," Edward replied.

"Mary's train," Lewis reminded them.

"It gets in just before noon—eleven fifty, isn't it, Ned?" In innocence Margaret spoke.

"Yes," Edward said unwillingly.

"Why didn't you say so?" Lewis shouted. He rose and lumbered from the room, pulling a fur cap out of his pocket as he went.

Margaret sat down at the table and poured herself a cup of coffee. Then deliberately she lit a cigarette, her eyes, as Edward knew, daring him to object. Well, he wasn't going to object. Whatever she did, she could do. She knew that he deplored the habit that women were taking up of smoking cigarettes, but so long as she did it only in her own home, he would not say anything.

"Has it occurred to you that Harrow is behaving a little foolishly about Mary?" he inquired.

The corners of her mouth quivered. "Has it occurred to you that you are growing rather handsome in your old age?"

Edward was embarrassed rather than diverted. "I am scarcely in my old age," he returned. He continued with his coffee which he was trying to learn to drink without cream, because of a slight though increasing tendency to nervous indigestion. With some effort of will he did not look at Margaret, because he knew she was looking at him and daring him to look at her. Suddenly he yielded and their eyes met, hers amused and his shy.

"What makes you say things that make me blush?" he complained. He could scarcely keep from laughter, and he was too honest to deny, at least to himself, that it was pleasant to have one's wife, after years of marriage, mention his increasing good looks.

"You're wearing better than I am," Margaret said. "You looked old for your age when you were young and now you look young for your age. It's monstrously unfair that a wrinkle shows up so on a woman."

"You haven't a wrinkle," he declared loyally. She did have a few, very fine ones, about her eyes, and one, rather deep, between her brows, because she did not want to wear glasses.

"Now about Lewis," she went on. "Yes, I think he is a little

silly about Mary and, yes, it does worry me, for while I know she won't fall in love with a boy of her own age, it doesn't stand to reason that Lewis is the only man possible for her. He wants to worship her and she loves to be worshiped. There's the danger."

He ignored what he believed was an edge of malice in her words. Margaret was behaving well to Mary now as the child grew up. The adolescence that he had dreaded had not been what he had feared. Mary did not conceal the fact that she loved him better than she did her mother, but on the other hand both Tommy and Sandy loved Margaret better. Things evened up in a family, he supposed. Young Mark had learned early to be equal in his demands upon both parents. At any rate, Margaret accepted Mary's partiality for her father.

"I know you don't like me to say this, Ned, but you have spoiled Mary, you know. You've done a little worshipping yourself."

"Nonsense!" He put down his coffee cup.

"Not nonsense, and I don't mind. I wouldn't like worship, for myself."

"Did you once tell Harrow that?"

There was no more than the old shadow of jealousy now. He enjoyed his security as a husband.

"I laughed! There's nothing kills worship so thoroughly as laughter. He was furious with me."

"Can't you tell Mary that?" His eyes upon her were humorous but he was glad he had not known this ten years ago.

"Oh, she's at the serious age. Love with a capital L!" She lifted Mark from his chair, wiped his mouth, and waved her hands at him. "Shoo with you, young man! Go outside and play. Tell Hattie to put on your snow suit and your galoshes."

Left alone with her in the warm and pleasant dining room he felt strangely sentimental. He wanted to convey this to her, and while he was choosing his words, she said, "The real danger is, of course, that Lew has reached the age where he worships youth." A mild cynicism gleamed in her eyes that were still sea blue.

"Queer how young men worship old women and old men the girls!"

He disliked hearing this platitude from her lips. Putting down his empty cup he wiped his short mustache carefully. "I was just thinking how much more I love you now than even I did when we were young." Words of love he usually spoke in the night, under the protection of darkness, and he was pleased that here in the bright snow-lit sunshine they did not sound absurd.

"Do you really, Ned?" She leaned on her elbows on the table and inquired this of him with a charming intensity.

The canary in the big bay window, inspired by the musical quality in her voice, burst into sudden song. They listened, gazing at each other with such communication that his answer scarcely seemed necessary. He rose from his chair, impelled to take her in his arms, and she, divining his necessity, rose too and met him in long embrace, which was the more passionate because each expected a door to open upon them. For once none did, and at last he drew away and looked at her. "I wish I could tell you all that I feel, I wish I knew how to put it into words. There are still times—don't laugh—when I really want to write poetry."

"I wouldn't dream of laughing," she said gently. "I think it's dear of you and wonderful—something not to be expected by a woman after she's twenty. I am blessed."

"Sure?" He wanted to penetrate deeply into her. Did he satisfy her every need at last? None of the surface mattered if he could be sure that in her fundamental self she was content with him. But he dared not make further demand. Some profound modesty in him inquired even at this moment why he should imagine that she could find a world within the limitations of his being. His conception of love's function now was that of a guarding if overwhelming tenderness, not so much demanding as providing. Did what he provided, then, complete her dreams?

"I'm sure," she said heartily.

At this moment the interruption came. Tommy strolled in for



late breakfast. It did not occur to him that he could be unwelcome anywhere and he entered with all the brightness of unimpeded youth. The only real regret that Edward felt concerning his son was that he had named him after old Thomas Seaton and therefore after Tom. These two had not hidden their peculiar affection for Tommy, and this had provided an escape thereby for Tommy from the somewhat austere attitude of Edward as a father. Tom Seaton had weathered into an elder bachelor who still continued to live with his parents. Long tours around the world, immersions in India and South Africa, and more recently a sudden interest in Italian music had given Tom Seaton an excuse for living. Edward considered him a bad influence on all the young men in Chedbury and especially upon Tommy, who was inclined, as his school career developed, to put on the airs of a man of the world, a world about which he really knew nothing except at second hand through his uncle.

Thus Edward saw his fresh-faced young son, who had recently grown so tall that he looked as though he walked upon stilts, enter the dining room with an air that was all too cheerful.

"Happy returns, you two," he said negligently. "Many more of 'em, et cetera."

Margaret, with pleasant composure, sat down at the table to pour coffee for her son. Edward continued to stand as he lit his pipe.

"Anything I can do for the party tonight?" he inquired.

"Nothing, dear," Margaret replied. It would have been impossible for anyone to have believed that a moment ago she had been a young and flushed woman in her husband's arms. She was now the matron, the mother of a grown son. Edward, looking at her from under his eyelids, felt the private excitement of a clandestine love affair. Nobody knew this woman except himself. Especially did young Tommy know nothing about her. It occurred to him also that they had really settled nothing about Harrow going to meet Mary. He did not want to speak of it before Tommy who

had all the surface cynicism of youth about love. He pulled out the gold watch that had Mark Haslatt's name on it. "I shall go to meet Mary," he announced.

"Do, dear," Margaret said smoothly. "I was thinking of going myself but if you're going, I'll meet Sandra. She gets in an hour later. I do wish the girls could synchronize."

"Mary always manages to come alone, for reasons she alone, alone can tell!" Tommy sang in a falsetto.

Both parents looked at him with stern eyes but his smooth pink face was innocent. Edward left the room abruptly. He heartily disliked the constant flippancy of his children's generation but it was incurable. Restrain it anywhere and it burst out somewhere else. He put on his hat and coat with a preoccupied gravity and searched for his cane. It was not to be found. He pressed a button and a new maid, whose name he could not remember, came from the kitchen.

"Where's my cane?" he demanded.

"I'll ask Master Tommy," she said at once.

He waited until she returned. "He says he was using it yestiddy," she murmured.

He waited again until she had returned with the cane, grunted when she handed it to him and went out the door. Surely Tommy was old enough to leave his father's canes alone.

"I'll buy him a cane next year for a Christmas present," Edward growled to himself.

But it was impossible on this morning to remain angry even with callous youth. The sunshine sparkled on the snow in the most obvious Christmas fashion. The merchants of Chedbury, having had a slightly better year than they expected, had gone to the extravagance of a large Christmas tree in the square and festooned lights around the lamp posts. He was pleased to see a sleigh pulled by a horse coming stolidly down the road between the passing automobiles, and then was taken aback by seeing that it was driven by Tom Seaton. There were even sleigh bells around the horse's

neck and Tom had found somewhere in the Seaton attic a tall white stovepipe hat. People were laughing at him, moved by Christmas tolerance.

"Tommy up yet?" Tom shouted at Edward, waving a scarlet whip as he passed.

Edward nodded and went on. Though it was a holiday and he had no intention of going to his office he could not forbear passing that way, since he was still early for the train, and then having arrived at the door he went in. He had during the recent years taken over the entire building for his printing shop and his book business. Although he had not allowed the books to absorb the shop, he would not print advertisements of cosmetics, of which he disapproved, but he still printed private cards, wedding and funeral announcements, and the programs for the Sunday services. Occasionally he quarreled with the minister's wording, for Joseph Barclay had grown more rather than less extreme in his middle age, and felt that the world was becoming so comfortable that people had to be scared to God. More than once Edward had returned the sacred copy with a firm note that unless it were modified to some sort of dignity he would not print it. Twice Barclay had refused compromise and twice there had been no printed programs in the church for that week.

The offices were decorated in the best of taste. Aided by Margaret, Edward had contrived just the right atmosphere in his own private office, enlarged by throwing together what had once been his father's office and Mather's. He had paneled the room in oak, and a portrait of his father hung opposite the door and over his own desk. The desk was solid but not large. His infrequent visits to New York offices had confirmed in him a dislike for large light-colored circular desks, confronting anyone who came in. The man behind such a desk designed himself to terrify and for this Edward suspected him of inner weakness.

The shop was of course idle today. It was still an open shop. Edward's blood pressure was points higher than it might have

been had he not faced grimly across his desk, some half dozen times, a group of men who came to insist that he operate a closed shop. John Carosi brought them, as he well knew, and time and again he had been on the point of firing the fellow except that in all fairness he had been compelled to promote him for excellence of work until now Carosi was his head foreman. The man was a convinced labor man, and yet so just and truthful that he allowed Edward to argue against unions. And Edward, in decency, was compelled to hear Carosi in reply.

Against Baynes, too, and as heartily, Edward had argued. As Harrow's success had brought the modest spate of novelists to Haslatt Brothers, Baynes, abetted by Sandra, had declared that the offices ought to be moved to New York, leaving only the shop in Chedbury. Edward would not hear of it. Offices in the city and workrooms in Chedbury would have meant, he believed, nothing but confusion.

"You want to keep your hand on everything," Baynes had accused with the irritability that had become natural to him these days.

"I do," Edward agreed. "I've told John he can't even hire a new man without my meeting him and having a talk, and he can't fire anybody unless I see the man myself and know what's gone wrong. It isn't just that I want everything in my own hands, either. I believe that people are reasonable if I take the trouble to explain things to them. I don't want labor and management against each other in our business."

Secretly he wondered whether the deviousness of Sandra had imagined Baynes the real head if the offices were in New York, Edward remaining merely the boss of the printing end. Once he would have spoken his doubt to Margaret, but he had learned as he grew older to withhold judgment, even of his sister-in-law.

Edward regularly went to New York once a fortnight, though Baynes had grown sufficiently steady, after Sandra's escapade with Peter Pitt, to be relied upon.

Three years before this year, now so near its end, the two families of Haslatt and Seaton, as well as the firm of Haslatt Brothers, then at the very height of its first real and permanent prosperity, had been shaken to their combined depths by Sandra's affair. It was all mixed up with business, in the way that only Sandra could mix such incompatibles as love and shop. More and more she had become responsible for publicity and promotion, showing indeed real talent for these unpleasant but essential aspects of publishing. Thus had she arranged for the arrival of Peter Pitt in the United States, for his successful lecture tour, and for the sale of his books, including *The Singed Flower*, as motion pictures.

Not even Edward himself had suspected her of anything more than business acumen. Baynes, later, in the midst of real agony, gave a ghastly grin as he confessed his misery.

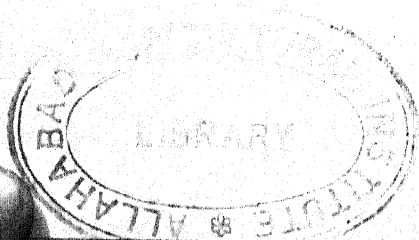
"It's beyond me, Ed. She's been driving a hard bargain with Peter Pitt, even while she's been carrying on. Our percentage is higher than ever. I don't know whether to love her or despise her for it."

That midnight now three years gone, when Baynes had rushed from New York to burst into the house, could not be forgotten. Fortunately Edward had not yet gone to bed. As he grew older he needed less sleep, while Margaret needed more, and he had been sitting in the library, his feet to the fire, reading one of the pile of manuscripts with which he never finished. The house was silent, the family asleep. From the distance of a fantastic novel about mountain climbing he had heard a cry and had looked up to see Baynes at the door, as gaunt as a ghost.

Even so Baynes had made a pretense of nonchalance. "There you are, Ed—I was hoping you hadn't gone to bed. Got a cigarette on you? I've consumed all mine."

Cigarette between his trembling lips, Baynes had dropped into a chair and had said in a squeaky voice, "Sandra's left me."

The fantasy slid from Edward's hands. "Where's she gone?"



Baynes held out a note and Edward had read it, his nose in the air as though he smelled something foul. "Dear Bub—" such was Sandra's absurd name for her husband. "Don't hate me, will you! At least not permanently? Pete and I are taking a trip—maybe only a little one. I just had to get some sort of radical change. I don't know why, either. Not your fault! Sandra."

He handed the note again to Baynes. "There's something queer in the Seaton blood," he had said solemnly.

"Have you—is it in Maggie, too?" Baynes had asked with clutching hope.

"No," Edward had said firmly, "not at all."

Baynes had shrugged his shoulders and Edward saw that he was trying not to weep and so he had gone on talking. "You had better go upstairs to the east guest room and get to bed." He was deeply moved by his brother's plight and very angry with Sandra, and so his voice was dry. "Have you eaten anything?"

"Couldn't," Baynes muttered.

"Come with me," Edward ordered, and docile as he had once been in his boyhood, Baynes followed his older brother into the pantry. Edward opened the icebox and took out a ham and some lettuce and a slice of cheese and a roll of butter. He went to the bread box and fetched a loaf and put the kettle on and measured coffee.

"I didn't know you were such a cook," Baynes said. His voice was trembling.

"I get myself a snack sometimes when I've been reading late," Edward replied.

He sliced bread and made a sandwich for Baynes and one for himself, and when the coffee was ready he poured out large cups full and found cream and sugar. Baynes looked at the food as though it sickened him, and then suddenly began to eat and drink and Edward saw the ordinary comfort of hot food seeping from body to soul.

"Of course I saw them running around," Baynes said after his

second cup of coffee. "I didn't think anything of it—everybody does that sort of thing now."

"You doing it, too?" Edward inquired.

"Only by way of business."

"Haslatt Brothers doesn't make any such requirements of you," Edward said.

"You don't understand," Baynes retorted with impatience. "You live up here in this pure little town."

"I don't know anything about the purity of the town. All I care about is my own home."

Baynes had looked at him with strange eyes but Edward had not inquired into their meaning.

"More coffee?" he had asked.

"No. I'm going to sleep," Baynes said heavily.

The brothers had separated without more talk.

Sandra had stayed away for nearly four months. She had gone to England and she wrote letters to them all with the most frightful effrontery, exactly as though she were merely visiting the land of her forefathers. She had the further impudence to discover and recommend to Edward a man who she believed could write novels, given sufficient encouragement. Baynes told no one that his wife had left him, and Edward told no one but Margaret. Whether she told the Seatons he did not know. The pretense was kept up in the family that Sandra was merely vacationing. Even Baynes as the weeks went on persuaded himself to the pretense and mentioned to Edward one day in the office, as though he were only mentioning it, that Sandra was returning on the eleventh of July.

Edward, beginning that year to struggle with increasing taxes, had not looked up from his accounts. "She's coming back, is she?"

"She's had her fling," Baynes said.

The affair had dried and hardened him. Ebullience had left him, perhaps forever, and his native New England toughness emerged to take its place. Baynes was no longer young.

"You want her back?" Edward inquired.

"She's still my wife," Baynes replied.

"You're being very decent."

"No—only doing what I want."

So Sandra had come back, and Mrs. Seaton gave her a little dinner party to which Edward found himself too busy to go, but at which, he heard from Margaret, the talk had been all of England. "Mother kept saying, 'Dear old England,' every five minutes," Margaret said and wrinkled her nose.

"Does your mother know?" Edward had demanded. He had got out of bed and gone to Margaret's room when he heard her come in and was lying in her bed when she opened the door.

"Of course Mother knows and so does Dad and so does Tom, but nobody is going to say anything outside, now that Sandra's home again."

"Are you going to say anything to Sandra?" he inquired.

She gave him a quick look, while she unfastened her necklace.

"Probably Sandra will tell me everything."

So Sandra had done one day when the two sisters were sitting on the beach alone, the children in the water and the men fishing. Edward had bought a house on the seashore in order that he might not have to decide each year where the family would go for their summers.

There was nothing much to the story, as Margaret told it to him that night. He had allowed himself to get too heavily sunburned and it was difficult to fix his attention on the somewhat dull story of Sandra and Pete, bicycling about England, and apparently doing very little. In the end Sandra had been bored. Nothing, she declared to Margaret, was more boring than trying to live with a writer. Pete, she felt sure, was continually planning to put everything she said and did into some future book. It was a relief to get back to her good old Baynes.

"She'll probably go off again—with a banker or something,"

Edward had said, trying to find a safe place upon which to rest his sore frame.

"I doubt it," Margaret said. "Sandra isn't really a passionate woman. That end of it bored her no end with Pete."

Edward was startled into forgetting his pains. "Why in God's name then did she—"

"Don't swear, Ned—she just wanted to make sure that there wasn't any more to it than she had with Baynes. Sandra's always been like that—wanting to be sure that she was getting all there was."

"What indecency!" he had cried.

"Isn't it!" Margaret had agreed.

He had not quite liked her placidity, in which he could not discern any of his own disapproval, but he had not pursued the subject further. He had remained cool to Sandra for some time, indeed to some degree ever since, but she seemed not to notice it. The Seaton family held its head as high as ever in Chedbury, and Tom if anything admired his younger sister more than before.

What had gone on between the mother and the daughters after Sandra came home Margaret told Edward only partially, in unwilling fragments.

"Mother told Sandra how foolish Aunt Dorothea looked when she was separated from Uncle Harold. A woman alone is so silly. I mean—nobody knows what to do with her." At this moment Margaret had laughed. "Incidentally, Mother was rather nice about you, Ned! She said you had made a really sound and respectable business and Sandra would have been stupid to cut herself off from it—especially for somebody with such a name as Peter Pitt!"

"Thanks," Edward had said with some reserve.

Mrs. Seaton had prevailed and the old New England blood in Baynes had resumed its control. Sandra was thinner than ever and with humor renewed and toughened.

In his own heart Edward asked himself, as he sat in the

privacy of his empty offices, how it was that Margaret had grown so well content with him. He believed that she was content. All the impetuous restlessness of her girlhood had left her and she had bloomed into a quiet half-indolent calm, her dark hair gray-ing softly about cheeks still pink. He had never fathomed her altogether, and now he had no wish to do so. If she enjoyed the un-failing stability of his love then he was fortunate.

The sunlight of the cold December shone as bright as polished steel upon the floor and he remembered with a start that he was to meet Mary's train. He rose and went into the shop to see that all was well. No one was here, either—or so he thought, the machines standing in silence, seeming to sleep in their unaccustomed stillness. Then at the end of the long room he saw John Carosi, in his good clothes, bending over a press, a small oil can in his hand.

"Hello, John," he called.

"Hello," Carosi replied. He had never called his employer sir.

"You can't keep away from here, either," Edward said smiling.

"I remembered there was something that didn't work right in this here press," Carosi replied, not acknowledging the smile.

"Well, merry Christmas—I've got to meet the train. My older daughter is coming."

"Mary?" John Carosi spoke her name while he continued to find small holes into which to thrust the pinpoint nozzle of the oil can.

"Yes," Edward said. In Chedbury the first name was the only one, but in his marriage he had absorbed from the Seaton family a sense of class distinction. None of his children shared this, and Mary would have answered joyously to John's use of her name.

He left the pressroom and putting on his hat and coat again and grasping his cane firmly against possibly slippery snow, he decided to walk to the station. From here the distance was short and the exercise would do him good. He mused as he trod firmly on the now hard-packed snow. He had a genuine liking for Ca-

rosi. What he disliked in the man was no individual attribute, perhaps, and yet on the other hand it might be just that. Carosi limited his world to his labor union. The small group of working men, dominated by a fiery boss, who was in turn at the command of a central human machine, was the universe within which John Carosi lived. All the multiple affairs of mankind, hunger in Asia, a possible war looming in Europe, the mounting cost of living here at home—all these he saw simply from the point of advantage or disadvantage for his union. Edward had had an argument with him one day on the question of whether the increasing cost of printing, which was nothing but the union pressing for higher wages, might not some day stifle the book business, even as, Baynes had declared, the unions in the city had hamstrung the theater and at the very moment when it had to meet the frightful competition of motion pictures.

"Our welfare can't be independent of union labor," he had urged, "but you in turn depend upon the general welfare."

"I've had enough of that," Carosi had replied with obstinate tranquillity. "We're lookin' after ourselves first, down at the union."

It had been a secret mitigation of the alarming depression still lingering in its aftereffects, that the hordes of the unemployed had thoroughly weakened all labor unions. Yet this slight good could scarcely compensate for the repercussions of the American depression on Europe.

He pondered this gloomily as he trod the sparkling snow this Christmas Eve, absently touching his hat to acquaintances he passed. Carosi's insistence upon the group advantage was more than the symbol of the danger of control of business by labor unions. He, Edward told himself, was entirely willing to grant that owners had been operating for years entirely within their own world, too, but he trusted owners more than labor unions if for no other reason than that owners were on the whole better educated. He was more afraid of ignorance combined with power

than of any other element in the world of man, and the more frightened because he saw, though at a distance, labor unions bringing to power a very ignorant fellow in Germany. No man, and no group of men, could live for self alone and be safe or make the world safe for others. Human life was a matter of proportion and balance, which he feared were both to be lost in the approaching future. Even Sandra, careless of the welfare of mankind, had seen from the vantage of England some sort of sinister shadow rising in Germany.

From such dark thoughts he was diverted by the whistle of the train flying into the station while he was still two blocks away, and making haste he arrived as the train was pulling out and in time to see his beloved daughter buried in the depths of the rough fur coat which Lewis Harrow began to wear after Thanksgiving and did not take off until just before Easter.

The train Mary had chosen was a slow one, and there were few people on the platform. For this Edward was thankful as he hastened forward. He did not care for the talkative tongues of Chedbury, after this spectacle. He was further dismayed when his presence did not immediately separate Lew from his daughter. Instead the fellow gave Mary an instant longer in his arms and then she sprang forth laughing, her dimples rampant.

"Dad, darling!" she cried in the fresh voice he was never sure was spontaneous or cultivated. Whichever it was, his heart melted at its music and he allowed Mary to kiss his cheek. She was the center of his heart and he considered her more beautiful even than Margaret had been at her age. This might be, however, merely that he felt in her some quality of his own and himself, an understanding of her that was natural, whereas he had been compelled to achieve such understanding of Margaret through the force of love. However he scolded Mary, and he intended to scold her now as soon as he got her to himself, he felt the bond between them held.

"Well, now," he said dryly. "Come along home. Your mother

wants to see you before she has to leave to meet the next train. She wonders that you and Sandy can't synchronize."

"Oh, we never do," Mary exclaimed.

Her charming face was less regular than her mother's, and its whole look was softer, perhaps because her eyes were brown instead of that clear sea blue. Her skin, too, was softly brunette, and her voice low rather than clear. Examining anxiously this lovely young face among flying black curls, under a small dark fur hat, Edward was alarmed to see how womanly it was, how firm were the red lips, how set the rounded chin. How far had Harrow gone into her untried heart? For surely she was as yet only a child.

Tucking her hand under his arm and giving but the smallest of nods to his most important author, Edward walked down the platform. His eyes fell on Mary's shoes. "There now—I wanted to walk home with you but in those shoes we can't. Of course there are your bags. I suppose you are loaded up with luggage as usual. Where is it?"

"Bill took it," Mary said in her composed little voice. "And I'd love to walk."

Bill was the porter. Inside the station he was waiting beside the assortment a young woman brings home for the holidays.

"You'll catch your death," Edward grumbled. "Though I suppose Bill can send the bags up and the sidewalks have been shoveled."

"I'll change as soon as I get home. Come along and don't fuss, darling."

He enjoyed being persuaded by his glowing young daughter, and they set forth upon streets emptied by Chedbury's early lunch hour.

"Oh, isn't it going to be a perfect Christmas?" Mary's feet dancing upon the hard snow caused her to bob upon his arm.

"It's begun," he replied.

Her bright upward look reminded him that he was going to

scold her and that he had better begin before they reached home. He never allowed himself to reproach his beloved child in Margaret's presence.

"Except," he said gravely, "I don't like it when Lew embraces you publicly like that. Maybe he's so old that it doesn't really matter."

He cast a sidewise glance down at her to see how this notion of Lew's age would move her. She repudiated it at once.

"Lew isn't old," she said with complete calm. "Besides, I like my men old."

"Lew is one of your men, is he?"

"Always has been," she said dreamily. "Ever since the first day he came to our house to lunch—always has been, always will be—"

He felt sure she was daring him to go on, and reluctantly he took the dare. "Your mother ought to tell you—" he began and paused.

"Tell me what?" she demanded, squeezing his arms. "Not the facts of life—please don't say that, Dad! I don't want to laugh—not at you."

He mustered his dignity. "What I was going to say is that young girls always fall in love with men too old for them. It's not real love."

"Did Mother?" The question was sharp with a sort of jealousy which he was quick to discern. Had this child also inherited his fatality?

"No, your mother is the exception to all rules about women."

"Maybe she didn't tell you."

He paused again on this. "I think she would have told me. She's entirely honest."

He looked down and met her dark eyes. There was something so quizzical, so mature, in this glance, so quickly veiled that he was frightened. The child was a woman!

He wanted to say no more but he loved her too much. "All I

want to say now is that I hope you know how dear you are to me. Lew is all very well as an author—one of the great ones, of course—but as a man, he's not fit to tie your shoestrings."

"How do you know, Dad?"

"Because I publish his books, that's how I know! He gets his stuff somewhere and not out of other people's books, either."

Then from her exquisite lips there came these words, blasting his soul and withering his spirit. "I don't care for the old ideas, Dad—I mean about purity and all that. I want a man to be a man, that's all."

"Mary—" he was holding her arm so tightly beneath his own that he was lifting her.

"Let me go, please, Dad."

"I'm sorry—but what I want to say is—there's a lot of men besides Lew—better men."

"Better?" She repudiated the word.

He set his teeth and looked grimly ahead. "See here, Mary—before we get home, let's have this out. You aren't going to marry Lewis Harrow. My son-in-law? It makes me sick. I'll quit publishing his books—damned if I won't!"

He felt her hand tighten on his sleeve. "He hasn't asked me, Dad."

"If he dares to—"

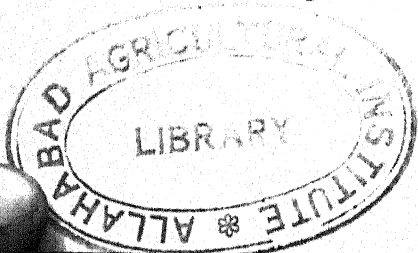
"I will."

They had reached the door of home and before he could utter the groan that welled up in him the door was flung open and Margaret ran down the steps, clad in her furs, a sprig of holly on her lapel, to embrace her daughter. Mary was small in comparison and her cheek sank into the softness of her mother's breast.

"Dear child," Margaret said lightly, "why, you're looking very pretty!"

Mary patted her mother's cheek. "You're looking rather wonderful yourself. Where'd you get that brooch?"

"Your father gave it to me last night for being married to him



so long. Now do wash quickly and eat your lunch, you two. It's being kept for you. Tommy was to have been here, but he's staying to luncheon with Mother and Father at the house. Now I must be off, or Sandy will feel nobody's bothered to meet her."

A touch on his arm and she was gone. Edward mounted the steps of his house, feeling as he always did, that when she was not there the house was empty. Mary had run ahead through the hall and up the stairs, and he heard her footsteps in the upper hall. She wanted to avoid him, for the first time in her life, and no wonder, with that avowal upon her lips. What was the use of having children when they broke one's heart? He remembered involuntarily the nights long ago when he had got up with her, wakened by her tiny wail and he fumbling to get the bottle hot. He had taken over the two-o'clock feedings because so often he worked late that it was not worth while to wake Margaret. That image was with him still, the wisp of agony he had held in his arms, the impatience, the despair of a human creature deprived of food, the greedy satisfaction when the seeking mouth found the milk, and then the rosebud child, replete and assured again, filled with warm food. He had not got up with the other children, and perhaps it had been those early-morning hours shared with his first child that had made her so precious to him now. He was far more terrified of her budding spirit today than even he had been of her fragile small body in those first weeks and months of her life. Then it had been a matter of newborn flesh and tender bones. Now it was something else, the birth of a quivering spirit, a heart newborn, a self no longer dependent upon him and seeking its sustenance elsewhere. When he thought of Lewis Harrow as the source to which she turned, his gorge rose.

He went upstairs to his room to be alone for a few minutes before he faced her again at lunch. He felt tired and he took off his shoes, and though it was midday, put on his leather slippers. Mark was asleep doubtless at this hour. With much rebellion, Mark still had to submit to his mother's firm decision for daytime

sleep. Since Tommy was away, it meant that today inevitably Edward and Mary must be alone for the meal. He felt dispirited and unequal to the necessity. Was he inadequate as a father? Pride rose to deny it, and he braced his shoulders and after a second's meditation decided to change his tie. He went to the mirror and adjusted the deep crimson tie that he chose, and then brushed his hair carefully. So habitual did the tending of one's body become as years passed, that with something like shyness he peered again at his long, rather sallow face, made more brown by his graying hair. Whatever had been young and fresh in his eyes was gone. They had grown piercing and his mouth was set in lines. Not a face to make a young girl want to confide in him! And confidence could never be forced. He could no more compel his child to open her lips now to speak her heart than he could have forced her baby lips to receive food when she was beyond the want of it. There it was—she was beyond the want of him. Nothing that he could provide did she now need.

With this discovery he knew that it was to Lewis Harrow he must appeal with the mustered force of his fatherhood. All that he could do in his daughter's presence was to be as nearly as he could the father whom she would consider ideal. He went downstairs, determined upon courtesy and even courtliness, the tender consideration of an elderly gentleman who happened to be her father, yielding to her grace and beauty.

She was there waiting for him in the dining room, the table set for two. Now that her fur coat was off she emerged as a small figure in scarlet wool, her curly hair cut to her shoulders in the fashion set by some motion-picture star whose name he could not remember. He disliked motion pictures, although they were becoming an important part of the revenue of his business. He had, however, gone to the filming of Harrow's last book, *The Shrew*. The leading part had been played by the star whose name he could not remember. She had been blond, and he was relieved that Mary could not look like her.

He pulled out her chair and smiled and was rewarded by the thanks he saw in her eyes. Had it been no more he might have been hardened, but he detected a mixture of timidity, her old childish yearning to be loved, and by him. He was melted at once and he gave himself up to being the ideal father that she wanted, as nearly as he could.

The day wore on to evening. He had tried to read some manuscripts, aware of the increasing noise and merriment in his house, and had been glad to give up all pretense when Margaret put her head into the open door of the library.

"Ned, do take Mark somewhere! He is everywhere he's not wanted and I have so much to attend to before the guests come."

"I thought the caterer was supposed to do it all," he grumbled, in spite of gratitude for the interruption.

"Oh, they always forget from year to year where the silver and glass are."

"Tommy home yet?"

"No. I think Tom took him to Boston."

"Did he tell you?"

"No, but Sandra called and said they might be late."

"I don't like Tommy going with Tom like that—he's too young and Tom's too old."

"Oh, well—it's Christmas, and Tom hasn't anybody special. Do hurry, dear, I hear Mark yelling in the butler's pantry."

"Get somebody to put on his outdoor things, will you?"

"I'll have him at the door." She hurried away and he gathered his papers together.

Half an hour later he was walking around the square with his son Mark skipping beside him, very handsome in a woolly brown coat and gaiters and a red knitted cap. The tree was alight and the festoons glittering. Mark was asking questions about Santa Claus and Edward answered them as honestly as he was

able, in view of the fact that Margaret had encouraged Mark to believe in the saint's myth.

"Have you seen Santa Claus?" Mark pressed.

"Well, in a way," Edward countered.

"Bringing me things?"

He had never allowed anyone to use baby talk to this intelligent son, and Mark's enunciation of words was pure and precocious.

"Well, bringing things, certainly."

"Which chimney will he come down tonight?"

"I'm not sure."

He diverted the conversation from mythology, which he had never approved on the grounds that it was foolish to build up a faith which had later only to be destroyed, and called Mark's attention to the electric lights on the tree.

"When I was a little boy, we didn't have any electric lights in Chedbury."

"Where did they come from?"

"All the people paid money and put up poles and we got it in from Boston."

Mark was not interested in electricity and having pronounced the name of Boston, Edward fell to musing about the city which he disliked and admired. In the frightful aftermath of the depression, Boston had practically gone bankrupt. It had not been surprising that New York had been in a like fix, and less interesting that Philadelphia, Detroit, and Chicago were all financially unsound at the same period. The swollen rolls of those millions of persons on relief had been maintained at starvation level only by the largesse, actually, of rich men, who had not been willing to lend their money, however, for anything much above starvation. He himself, as one of the leading businessmen of the Boston area, had been invited to go with a committee to wait upon a Boston multimillionaire, who declared that while he did not want to be responsible for people dying in the streets, yet because he had worked for his money, he was sure that others could do so, and

therefore he had to have a guarantee that the weekly dole would be a minimum.

Somehow, largely thanks to Harrow, Haslatt Brothers had continued prosperous enough so that in Edward's own house there had been little sign of the shortages which afflicted even houses once well to do. He had insisted that Margaret not serve champagne at their Christmas party last year, when things had been at their worst because trade had fallen off with Europe after American loans had ceased. This year things were better, however, and he had not mentioned the champagne. It would be served tonight, he supposed, in the great cut-glass punch bowl which the old Seatons had given them ten years ago as an anniversary present. Still, he didn't like the looks of things. Huey Long, for instance, was setting himself up in a very peculiar fashion there in the South. He himself had never been in the South and never intended to go, but it was too much like what was going on in Germany with that fellow Hitler. He was beginning to imagine that Chedbury was nearer both Louisiana and Germany than was comfortable.

The discomfort of his thoughts turned his instincts toward the warm shelter of his house.

"We'd better go home," he said to Mark.

The child had been silent for a while, clinging to his father's hand. His Christmas exuberance was suddenly over.

Edward bent to his beloved son. "Are you cold?" he demanded. He laid his lean cheek against Mark's round and rosy one.

Mark whimpered. "It's getting dark."

Remembering that the child had always been unaccountably afraid of the night, Edward was reassured. "We'll go home right away."

"Can't you see the dark?" Mark asked in a small voice.

"I was thinking of things."

"What things, Daddy?"

"Faraway things—like Germany."

"What's Germany?"

"A place."

"Is it a good place?"

"Not very, I'm afraid—not just now. Come along, trot!"

Together they trotted down the street which had once been a road to the country, and in a half hour or so the house loomed up a mass of light and cheer. Sandy and Tommy had last year devised a system of indirect lighting upon the snow-covered trees which was far more effective than the usual string of small electric bulbs. Tonight Sandy had turned the lights on early, being an extravagant miss. He had not yet seen her, for she had left her Christmas shopping to do in Chedbury, her finishing school being in a remote spot on the Hudson, and she had used all her available afternoons for theater matinees, to which she was addicted.

When he and Mark entered the house she was whirling in a solitary dance of her own under the mistletoe in the hall, and not another soul was in sight. She fell upon him ardently and with kisses when he came in, and she knelt to hug Mark. She was still satisfyingly a girl, with none of the disturbing signs of womanhood. Her short hair, just escaping red, her honestly freckled short nose, and gray-green eyes did not as yet spell beauty.

"I hope you've got my Christmas present," he said by way of a mild preliminary joke.

"I did, you selfish thing," she said laughing. "I've got everybody's presents and I like all I got and I hope people will give me the same things. Dad, I bought Mother a tiny bottle of real perfume—rose! It cost so much that I'm strapped."

"How much do you need?" He put his hand to his pocket, accustomed to this situation.

"Oh, Dad, not tonight—I can't shop tomorrow anyway—but before I go back to school. Mother said I was to take Mark and give him his supper and put him straight to bed."

"I'm going to stay up for the party," Mark shouted, preparing tears.

"When you're six," Edward reminded.

"I'll be going on six soon, next year maybe," Mark retorted.

"Not this year," Edward said with firmness. He did not want this child's fine body destroyed by unwisdom, and he hardened his heart to Mark's loud cries as his sister led him away.

The rooms were warm and beautiful, decked with holly as they were, the chandeliers lighted, the satin sofas gleaming softly. The fires were laid but not lit. It was a home of which any man could be proud. Piece by piece he and Margaret had replaced the cheap things of their first years and now there was not a table, not a chair, of which to be ashamed. He liked only a few pictures on his walls, and when they had been in Italy they had brought back four fine small paintings, not old masterpieces, but good enough to draw the admiration of those who knew such art. The heavy curtains were drawn over the windows and there was a smell of spice in the air, a dash of rum with it. At this hour Margaret would be superintending the eggnog, and he would not disturb her. At the far end of the library, now that the rooms were thrown together, the Christmas tree shone tall and green, decorated in silver. He liked a big tree, remembering the meager trees of his own boyhood.

Then in some haste he pulled out the heavy gold watch his father had left him. He must dress early, for he had to go and fetch his mother and Louise.

The year after his father's death it had become evident that his mother must not live alone, and he had not suggested that she live with him, divining that his house would not be the more peaceful for bringing his mother and Margaret under one roof. Instead he had sought out his sister, living then with another teacher in a small apartment, and with difficulty he had persuaded her to go home and live with their mother.

He had been surprised at the stubbornness with which Louise had met his idea. "It isn't as if you had a real home of your own," he had said.

She had looked at him with strange pale eyes. "That's the very reason I don't want to go," she had replied.

In the end she had gone, however, and he had tried to make it up to her by putting some new comforts into the house, an oil burner, and a new refrigerator instead of the old icebox. Louise had received the benefits in silence. But silence was natural to her. He had no idea what she thought about anything, though he acknowledged that in her tall narrow way she had grown rather distinguished looking, and two years ago she had been appointed assistant to the principal of the Chedbury school. He was sure she was better at administration than at teaching.

He went upstairs and dressed carefully in the new evening things that he had bought just before the depression, at Margaret's insistence. He had resisted her because, not having put on weight, he had thought his college clothes would last him the rest of his life. But as usual, when she appealed to his vanity for her own sake, he had yielded. She had chosen the material, a violet black over which he had demurred because of the price.

"This suit you really may wear the rest of your life," she had argued.

So he had yielded again, and then had been secretly glad to have done so, because the garments were cut to fit his tall bony frame and with a pleasure which he would have been ashamed to acknowledge, he enjoyed the softness of the satin linings.

He looked into the pantry on his way out. Its old-fashioned size was never at better advantage than upon such an occasion, and presiding over the caterer and his minions was Margaret, her hair curling about her face, her cheeks scarlet with heat and excitement. She looked at him.

"Oh, Ned, you're dressed already! Is it so late? What did you do to Mark? He's so excited. I must get dressed at once if you're going for Louise and Mother. Do taste this—it's champagne cup. I made it because so many people secretly don't like eggnog and are ashamed to say so on Christmas." She poured half

a glass of the mixture and he drank it, after the first taste, with appreciation.

"Really good!" he exclaimed.

She flushed with his praise, and he would like to have kissed her but could not, under the covertly staring eyes of the minions.

"Don't hurry," he told her. "I shall take my time getting home. Mother's always too early."

He went away, having backed his car out of the garage with unusual skill, for he was not a good driver, far less skillful than any of his older children, and they were apt to blame him for small scratches and scrapes on the fenders. The car was a good one and he was proud of it. He would not for any reason have possessed the showy affair the Seaton's had bought some five years ago, which had a glass pane between themselves and poor old Job Brummel, who, though their chauffeur, was still and always would be little more than a handyman. Thomas Seaton had hired Job the year after Bill Core died of old age, because of his strangely English profile, inherited from some faraway ancestor who came to America from London. "Makes me feel as though I was sitting in a 'ackney coach," Thomas said with exaggerated cockneyism.

Edward drove carefully, mindful of ice freezing now on top of the snow, and aware of unsteadiness under the wheels. He wondered if he should have put on chains, which he did not know how to do in any case. In his secret heart he wondered, too, if he ought not to hire a driver when the children went back to school. He could not be sure whether in Chedbury it would be thought pretentious. Though again, he reflected, it might be considered only some of Margaret's Seaton blood, but no, damn it, he would not take refuge behind that. If he wanted a hired man to drive his car, he would have him. But overhead could creep up, and the depression was still far from over. He fell to ruminating again on the painful state of the world, put awry by the war and not yet straight, while clouds of war loomed again over human horizons.

Then resolutely he put away his haunting fears and reaching his

mother's house he parked the car fairly well, and went in. His mother was dressed and waiting in the living room, her coat and gloves laid together. Louise was reading a magazine, that new digest, he noticed, which he had declared was ruining the book trade. Who would buy a book for two dollars and a half when he could get such a bulk of reading material for a quarter? Louise was wearing a new dress, a dull blue taffeta that was rather becoming. Her blond hair had not grayed and she put aside her glasses as he came in.

"I'm early," he announced. He bent to kiss his mother's dried cheek. Her middle-aged fleshiness had dropped away and she was withered and old. Her scanty white hair was not curled, but she had put into the knot on top of her head her one treasure, a jeweled comb that his father's grandmother had once owned—how, he had never thought to inquire.

"You look quite handsome, Mother," he said, sitting down. "I never saw the comb look better. It becomes your hair since you've grown white."

"I'm going to give it to Margaret one of these days," she declared. Her voice was as piercing as ever and her eyes were undimmed.

He caught a creeping hostile look on his sister's face but she did not speak. "You must give it to Louise," he said.

"No, for she isn't going to get married, so far as I can see," his mother complained. "I want Mary should have it, really, but I suppose it ought to go to Margaret first, in order."

"I don't see why," he said. "Margaret has her own things to inherit."

"Maybe I will give it to Mary, then," his mother went on. "Did I tell you it came from Spain once?"

"No, did it?" He was interested now. Spain, that country of angels and devils, that past heaven and hotbed of present evil! Only last Sunday he had seen a picture in the Sunday newspaper of the plump portentous little man who was rising to power there. How

could people worship such gods? At least let them be beautiful.

"There's a mystery about this comb," his mother said with some reserve. "Your great grandfather gave it to his wife honestly enough but his mother had it from somebuddy—nobuddy knows who. Anyway, it's said that's how the Haslatts come by their dark skins."

He was amused at this possibility in past ages and he laughed soundlessly.

"Oh, Mother," Louise said with impatience. "Everybody is always talking about Spanish ancestors."

"Well, we have the comb, haven't we?" his mother's voice was triumphant.

"What if it's only Portuguese?" Edward inquired with mischief.

His mother rose. "You two are just as contrary as ever you were. Let's go. If we're early maybe I can help Margaret."

He knew Margaret's dismay at this possibility and he made haste to put his mother off. "She's got the caterers there tonight—everything's ready, I believe, but we might as well go."

His mother and Louise both put on their day coats, and he made a mental note that next Christmas he would placate Louise still further by a fur evening cape, and then they were all in the car and he was driving his careful way homeward. His mother, sitting beside him, clutched the arm of the seat in a fashion disheartening to him, but he did not mention it to her, aware that for one who had grown up with horses and buggies, a motor car would always be a hazard.

Once in the house he ensconced his mother in a large armchair and leaving Louise to her own devices he hastened upstairs to find his little son and bid him good night.

Mark was in his bed, his arms under his head, the covers drawn to his neck and his face unusually thoughtful.

"I was waiting for you," he said at the sight of his father.

"I thought you would be," Edward replied and bent to kiss him.



That cheek, so soft, so fragrant under his lips, nearly broke his heart with love. Lest he betray his extravagant tenderness he said in his driest voice, "You'd better go to sleep before the noise begins."

"I like Christmas," Mark said dreamily, "but I don't like the night before, because here I must lie, alone in the dark, while people are alive and laughing everywhere."

"You're alive, too," Edward said sharply.

"Not like in the day," Mark said simply.

The child was really too precocious, Edward told himself. He must talk with Margaret about it after the holidays were over. They must take care of this son, this treasure.

"I shall be coming back to see you every now and then," he said, "and I will light the candles on the mantel, so that you will not be in the dark."

He lit the candles one and the other, and turned to catch his son's smile. "Thank you, Daddy," Mark said, and closed his eyes to sleep.

Christmas Eve proceeded according to a pattern long established and well enjoyed. Chedbury, out of deference to one whom it recognized as a leading citizen, though of a sort they did not wholly comprehend, had years ago decided against any other event on the twenty-fourth of December. Edward Haslatt's party was paramount. It was a heterogeneous affair. To its earlier hours came those citizens who, though entirely welcome to stay out the evening, knew instinctively that eleven o'clock was the hour at which they should appear before host and hostess to say good-by, to give their polite thanks for a "nice time," and to wish a merry Christmas.

The party remained somewhat staid and decorous, a family affair, for those earlier hours. Only near midnight did its loose strands knit themselves into something homogeneous and close. Conversation was no longer labored, and laughter rippled through

the rooms. The band, which Edward each year brought from Boston, put aside waltzes and fox trots and set up the catching intoxicating rhythms that had taken such hold upon the youth during the depression. Since there was neither hope nor freedom in the world of reason, they found it in their bodies.

Edward did not like it. He was slightly fatigued by the task of being host to people he had known all his life, to whom he was Ed Haslatt, the son of old Mark, and yet from whom he was now separated because he had built up a business that published books many of which Chedbury could not read. Never quite sure of where Ed left off and Mr. Edward Haslatt began, their old ease was gone, except as Edward himself determinedly kept it. But this, too, was tiring, and as he grew older and his business forced him to become aware of a world of which Chedbury could know nothing, and yet of which it was nonetheless a part in these strange times, he found himself increasingly solitary.

Now, the rooms half emptied, he sat down in an easy chair in a corner of the library to take a few minutes' rest. The champagne cup had gone well. The eggnog would please those who were left. He could see old Thomas Seaton sipping his foaming glass with dreamy pleasure. The old man had given himself up to the joys of the flesh. Everybody was worried about him and Dr. Wynne warned him every time he saw him. Even tonight he was looking at him, while he sat beside Mrs. Seaton. They were talking about old Thomas, and Mrs. Seaton assuredly was saying the same thing she always said: "Thomas says he may as well die an enjoyable death. He says he doesn't want to die hungry and thirsty, and go empty and dry into eternity."

The young people were forming themselves together into that new thing, that rhumba, a savage performance. He saw Lewis Harrow go up to Margaret and propose himself as her partner. Thank God she was shaking her head. Harrow looked all too well in evening clothes. His dark hair had not silvered properly. Instead it had stayed coal black, and grown white only at the sides, as

though it were dyed. Yet in justice he had to acknowledge that Lew would not stoop to such folly as hair dyeing.

Now, as though having invited and been refused by his hostess excused him for willfully doing what might make his host angry, Harrow went straight to Mary. She had avoided all other invitations, flitting here and there in her gown of cloudy white, making a pretense of seeing that her grandmothers were tended. Now as Edward watched her he saw a pretty tableau, too distant for him to hear the conversation. The child bent over her Grandmother Haslatt with all her conscious grace, and he saw his mother melt under the loving deference that Mary showed her, and that he was none too sure was not entirely a knowing process of charm. His mother was saying something. Then she took the high Spanish comb from her hair and gave it to Mary. The child's hair was short and how could she wear it? Ah, she was kneeling, and he saw his mother with a sort of tender triumph gather the dark curls together and catch them on top of Mary's head and hold them with the jeweled comb. Mary rose to her feet just as Harrow came near and she looked up at him with that dewy shyness, which again might be only a process of her conscious charm. Whatever it was, what man could resist it? He did not believe that Harrow said a word. The fellow simply held out his arms, and Mary went into them and then the band, as if the performers saw and understood, began to quicken the subtle rhythm, to sharpen its passionate accents, and Harrow and Mary were dancing away as one, and all eyes were on them.

Edward hid his own eyes behind his hand. The fellow danced supremely well, and he was wooing Mary with all the skills of the flesh, and she, at the very age when in spite of her delicacies, it was the flesh she craved, could not but respond. He had not the heart to blame her, remembering himself and Margaret at that age. But they had not such freedom as this thing, this rhumba, with all its license, could and did allow.

He rose, intolerably stung, and went toward the dancers. Mar-

garet, watching him, met him, and slipped her hand under his arm.

"Everything is going well, I think," she said with calm.

"It seems so," Edward replied.

"How do you like my gown?" she demanded.

He looked down at her. It was a violet velvet, very pale and soft.

"It's new, isn't it?"

She laughed. "Oh, Ned, you never quite know, do you? Well, yes, it is. Do you think the color is a little old for me?"

"If you mean do you look old in it, the answer is no. Certainly not. Who's that girl Tommy is dancing with?"

"Somebody he brought back from Boston with him, on the spur of the moment."

"I don't like her looks."

"She's very pretty."

"Too obvious."

The girl, wrapped in a sort of sheath of gold, was as thin as a stick and her straight yellow hair floated in ribbons behind her violently moving head.

"What's her name?"

"I don't know—Dinny something."

"Queer times," he commented.

With such camouflage did he conceal the approach to the one thing about which he was thinking. Now he came to it. "Margaret, we've got to do something about Harrow and Mary. I simply won't have it. Why, she might want to marry him!"

"I know, dear. But we can't, you know, any more than I can do anything about my father's fourth cup of eggnog which I see him taking this very minute."

But she would try, nevertheless. Overcome by anxiety she left him swiftly and crossed the floor to the long table in the dining room where old Thomas, already shaky, was holding his cup toward a laughing woman who was filling it.

Thus deserted, Edward felt the blood rise to his brain and

intoxicated with his own anger, he walked firmly among the dancers and approached Lewis Harrow and touched him on the arm.

"Come with me a moment, please," he said distinctly.

Harrow, surprised, came out of his trance. "Can't business wait?" he demanded.

"No," Edward said. He met Mary's hot eyes with a cold stare and with Harrow beside him he led the way to his own small study which of all the downstairs rooms had not been thrown open. The sudden quiet behind the shut door only hardened his resolve. "You needn't sit down, Harrow," he said with the same cold distinctiveness of enunciation. "I simply want to say that you are to leave my daughter alone. She's a child."

Harrow blinked. He had been well aware of Edward's anger at the station this morning, but he had been determined to ignore it. He would ignore it now. "She's not quite a child," he said mildly.

"In comparison to you she is," Edward said. "I don't forget all between us that is good and useful to us both, but I'd throw it all away rather than see her—"

"What?" Harrow asked with malicious mischief.

"Commit her heart to you," Edward said gravely.

Harrow flung himself into one of the leather armchairs. "You're so damned serious," he complained.

"About Mary I am," Edward agreed.

Harrow gave him a strange look. He smoothed back the white wings of his hair with his open palms, and lit a cigarette. "Very well, then, I'll be serious. I consider it rather a privilege for a young girl to fall in love for the first time with an older man—especially me."

Edward gazed at him with actual hate. Underneath it his old jealousy burned, transferred now to this young and tender creature who was his daughter and yet somehow compound, too, of Margaret.

"And how do you feel toward her?" he asked in a thick voice. "When you've made her—love you—then what will you do?"



Harrow looked away. "I don't know," he said at last. "I really don't know."

"It's wicked of you," Edward said.

Harrow glanced at him and away. "These things grow."

At this moment the door was flung open. Mary of course he had been expecting, but Mary angry and unreasonable. This was not she. Mary was weeping and she seized his hand.

"Oh, Dad," she gasped. "Oh, Dad—"

"What, dear?"

"Grandfather—he's—he's— Mother says you must come—oh quickly, please, Dad!"

He had no time to decide. Margaret needed him. He left Mary, catching in his distraction one last glimpse of her. Harrow had risen and put out his arms, and she had gone into them. He heard her crying. "Oh, Lew, he's dead—he's dead—I can't bear to see him—"

But he did not pause. Margaret needed him.

Beside the Christmas tree lay Thomas Seaton. He had gone to toast the tree, making a joke of it as he had made a joke of everything in his life.

"Evergreen forever!" he had been declaiming, before the laughing guests. "I who am about to depart—salute thee, the eternal—"

By some strange coincidence of life and death he had fallen at the very moment he lifted the cup to his lips, and the blazing lights of the tree shone down on him as his knees crumpled. Margaret had run to him, but Tom had already caught him. Mrs. Seaton had turned away her head, and Tommy had found Dr. Wynne, napping behind a tubbed palm tree.

Edward hurried to the gathering crowd and parted them with his hands. Margaret sat with her father's head in her lap. She was tearless, and her face was ashen as she lifted it to her husband.

"Come, dear," he said. "Tommy, take your mother's place. Where's Sandy?"

"She ran upstairs—s-sir," Tommy stammered. He looked sick and pale.

"Nothing we can do," the doctor was murmuring. "It came as I feared it would."

"The way he wanted it," Mrs. Seaton said. "Margaret, take me away, please."

Between them they led the quivering old lady upstairs, and into the gray and rose guest room. She was almost entirely calm, and the blow for which she had prepared herself so long had fallen at last and yet she could not quite bear it as she had imagined she could.

"I shall lie down for a bit. Leave me, please, Margaret. I must be alone. Edward, you'll see to everything. Tom's not reliable enough."

"Of course," he said.

"Mother, let me stay—" Margaret began, but Mrs. Seaton would not have it. With a sort of subdued wildness she shook her head. "I must be quite alone—really, I must, just for a bit."

So they left her on the bed under the rose satin quilt, her eyes closed and dry, her lips trembling.

Outside the door Edward took his wife into his arms. "I think of you," he muttered, "only of you."

He put out of his mind the image of Mary alone with Harrow. Doubtless the fellow had told her what had passed. Never mind now—nothing mattered but this straight silent woman in his arms, his beloved, his own. She had buried her face in his shoulder and he thought she would weep but she did not. She held him hard, her hands under his arms and clutching his shoulders, for a long moment. Then she lifted her face and began to cry. "It's strange," she sobbed. "Somehow I clung to Dad in my heart—maybe all daughters do."

Did they? Then what about his own daughter? Who knew what was happening in that small closed room behind the shut door? Old Thomas had not really wanted Margaret to marry him, ei-

ther, and she had been as willful as Mary was today. Ah, Margaret was his first love, his only love. He put the thought of his child away from him. No child should come between them now. He pressed her head close upon his shoulder and began his comfort. "You were always the best daughter in the world to him. He loved you better than any of his children."

"Do you think so, Ned? Really?" She was trying to control herself, tightening her throat, stopping her tears. She looked up at him and he saw her wet lashes and her eyes blue beneath them and his heart was wrenched with the old painful love, infinitely increased by the years and all that had been and had not been between them.

"I wish I could comfort you," he said with tender wistfulness. "I wish I knew how. I love you so terribly."

He saw her face, so schooled by life, by wifehood and motherhood, soften and quiver and break into a trembling smile, molten with sorrow. "Oh, Ned—oh, Ned—I wish I had been a better wife to you, darling."

"But you have been—you've been perfect."

"No, I haven't. I haven't been half I wanted to be—that day we were first married."

"Then I haven't known it," he said. With astonishment he considered what she had just said, his arms still hard about her. Had she indeed been suffering some private remorse? But for what? He could not imagine.

Then holding her thus, before they returned to the things that had to be done, it came to him that even as he had reproached himself now and again for allowing his worries and cares, even his success, to separate him from her, so she too might have like causes for reproach. They still had a great deal to learn about one another.

"We've only begun to be married," he declared suddenly. "It's taken us all these years to get going—earning a living, raising children—now let's just be married, will you, sweetheart?"

The old name that he had not used for so long, scarcely since she had been a mother to his children, was new again and infinitely exciting. She lifted her lips and he kissed her, the most profound, the most passionate kiss that they had ever shared. All that had been was only the approach to what was yet to be. What was that she had said? That she had clung secretly, as daughters do, to her father! Well, that was over. He had no longer to compete with Thomas Seaton's charm and humor and gaiety. He had Margaret now to himself, forever. Reproaching himself in the midst of sorrow, he pressed her head to his shoulder and she yielded. They stole yet another moment to be alone together and the years slipped away.

Yet underneath the steadfast duty with which he supported his beloved, he suffered an agony of uneasiness. What had taken place between Mary and Lewis Harrow in his study when he was so suddenly called away? He had left them alone together and what more natural than that Harrow had undertaken to comfort his Mary? In the girl's shaken state, weeping for the grandfather she had loved, what more natural than that she would have accepted such comfort?

Edward hastened downstairs, having put Margaret to bed with promises of his swift return to her. But Harrow was gone, as were all the guests. His children were behaving beautifully. Tom had taken his father's body home, and Harrow, Sandy explained, had gone with him to help him.

Edward paused a moment for this younger daughter, perceiving in her manner a humility new and overeager.

"Were you afraid of Grandfather, dear?" he inquired, remembering that Tommy had reported her flight.

Her freckles were submerged in sudden color. "I'm fearfully ashamed—especially when I'm thinking of being a doctor."

"It is hard the first time," he agreed. A doctor? He was not sure women should be doctors, and he forbore discussion of it now. In

the distance he saw Mary. "You two girls had better straighten things up," he told Sandy.

"Yes, Dad," she said obediently.

His mother and Louise were still there. In the suddenly quiet house all of them began now to straighten the rooms, putting the chairs in their places, picking up the paper streamers and toy hats, the empty cups and glasses and restoring the house to decency again. Only the Christmas tree had been left blazing and Edward, unable to bear its garishness, touched the button that put out the lights. Thus abruptly, too, had the light of life gone from the shining and vigorous old man.

His daughters were subdued and they moved from room to room and when all was done they bade him good night quietly. He called Mary back.

"Mary!"

"Yes, Father?"

"Wait a minute, please."

"I was going up to Grandmother."

"I think she'd rather be alone."

"But I want to be with her."

Their eyes met, their wills crossed and clashed and he yielded.

"Very well."

"Good night, Father."

"Good night, my dear."

She ran upstairs swiftly, her cloudy skirts held high, the Spanish comb gleaming in her hair, and he sat down exhausted. Yet he must now take his mother and sister home. They were waiting.

"I can drive, unless you think you need the car," Louise suggested.

"I had better have the car tonight," Edward said, considering.

"I never thought old Mr. Seaton would go this way," his mother mourned.

"It was a good way to go," Edward replied. He shrank from his mother's interest in the dying and the dead.

"I suppose you will have to plan the funeral," she went on.

"Joe Barclay will do that," Edward said.

"Oughtn't you go over to the house tonight?" she suggested.

"I suppose so," Edward said unwillingly, "unless Margaret needs me."

"We'd better go home since we're no more use here."

So saying his mother rose and a moment later they were riding through the cold and snowy night. Lights shone from the windows of houses where belated parents were still filling Christmas stockings and decorating trees and the silence broke when the bells of the church began to ring softly the notes of a Christmas hymn. Children half waking would know that Christmas Day had come, would smile and sleep again. Only an old man would never wake.

The solemnity of the ending of Thomas Seaton's life filled Edward's mind. He had never loved his father-in-law, aware, while refusing to acknowledge it, that there had been some secret rivalry between them. Margaret had belonged to them both. She had clung to her father—that was what she had said tonight—but how much? Perhaps the withdrawal of which he had been so often conscious was because the core of her heart had clung to another, not him. It was not the common rivalry between father and husband but between two different men, the one gay and careless, rich in living, humorous, articulate, his words flowing easily, and the other—himself. He remembered absurdly, after these many years, that Thomas Seaton had once wanted Margaret to marry Harold Ames, who was now the president of a great bank in New York. Edward saw his picture sometimes in the Sunday newspapers, opening a campaign for the Republican party, heading a drive for the Red Cross, giving a check to the mayor for city relief. The handsome smooth face might have been Thomas Seaton's own, a quarter of a century younger. Margaret had not, so far as he knew, ever seen Harold Ames again. But his memory perhaps had survived in her love for her father and her father had forever condi-

tioned her heart. The old doubt that he, Edward Haslatt, could every wholly possess her, added despair to his dejection.

"Here you are, Mother," he said and drew up at the doorway of his father's house.

"Don't get out," she said, preparing the difficult descent.

"Of course I shall," he retorted.

He got out and saw her to the door, unlocking it and turning on the light in the hall before he stooped to kiss her good night. Louise had come in and closed the door, as he found when he turned to go out. The house had seemed strange since his father's death, a house lived in only by women, who in their unconscious fashion had removed from it bit by bit all his father's ways and possessions.

"Good night, Louise," he said, and opened the door.

To his surprise she followed him to the porch and closed the door on the old woman toiling up the stairs.

"Ed, I don't know as I ought to add trouble to this night," Louise said.

He looked down at her pale still face, wrapped around by a knitted woolen scarf that she called a fascinator.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

She hesitated. "Maybe I oughtn't to say."

"For God's sake, Louise," he exclaimed, "why can you never speak out?"

"You've no call to swear at me, Ed. I only want to do what's right."

Her trembling lips infuriated him. All the anger he never showed to Margaret and Mary sprang out at this dull and pallid sister of his. "I hate hemming and hawing. If you have something to say, then say it."

"All right, and don't blame me—but I saw Mary and that—that—"

"Well?" His voice stabbed her.

"Lew Harrow was hugging her."

"That doesn't mean anything nowadays," he mumbled.

"After you went upstairs," she continued doggedly. "And I heard her say, I will—I will, two times, like that."

"Will what?"

"How could I know?"

"Just how did it happen that you heard anything at all?"

"I went—I went—"

Her voice faltered, her head dropped, and she untied the woolen ends about her neck. A monstrous idea occurred to him. She had gone to see what Harrow was doing!

"Why did it interest you to know what Harrow was doing?"

His own injustice occurred to him with these words. Why did it interest him to know the secrets of his sister?

"I didn't think you'd want Mary—to—to—"

"I have never known you to take so much interest in Mary."

In the light of the circle of electric lights, which made the meager Christmas decoration of the doorway, he saw his sister fling up her head in one of her rare fits of anger. He knew these outbursts, coming perhaps once a year after months of creeping silence, and he braced himself.

"You think you're so wonderful, don't you, Ed? You think you're much better than the rest of your family. Yes, you do. And that's what Uncle Henry thinks, too. You never go to see poor old Uncle Henry, though now he's in the county home."

"What in heaven's name has that old skinflint to do with what you were talking about?"

It was true that he had paid no attention to this old relative who had bullied his father in days when the family was poor. Louise could not remember, nor could Baynes, those early years when he had heard his parents worrying lest Henry might be offended and withdraw the pitiful wages he paid his younger brother Mark.

"Because you think you're so fine," Louise raged. "You think Mary is better than any of the other girls. Well, I taught her in school and I tell you she isn't. She's run after Lew Harrow for years—simply years. She's like any of the other silly girls."

"Stop!" He held his hands to keep from striking this foolish old maid who was his sister.

"I won't stop. I'll tell you the truth if nobody else will. Do you think a man like Lew Harrow could really care for a child, a schoolgirl like Mary? Why, he's famous, he's had lots of women, I guess—anyway, he could."

Her voice broke and as always happened her anger could not sustain itself. She began to cry and turning to the door she fumbled for the knob, the fascinator falling over her face.

He understood suddenly what had made the rage and he was embarrassed, ashamed. They had never been close, he and this sister, and he did not want to know her secrets. He would not tell her what he saw, that she hated his Mary because she herself had, in her feeble way, felt the strength of Harrow's charm—even she! And in her poor way she had fallen in love with him. He pitied her. Impatience changed in him to pity, but shame was still stronger. He would be ashamed before Harrow, lest that man, so acute in the knowledge of the human heart, might already know what he had not known until this moment.

"Let me open the door for you, Louise," he said. His voice was husky. In the space of a minute the curtain between them had been thrown back and he saw her as she had been, a pale little girl hostile to boys and, it seemed to him, including him somehow among boys. She had never learned to come out of herself, and she had never let anyone come in to her heart or mind until now. The monstrous fantasy of her imagination, in dreaming that Harrow could think of her—but perhaps she had not so dreamed. Perhaps it had been enough that she thought of him, that he filled her secret heart, so long as he was not married. She had not minded, perhaps, that he had loved other women unknown to her, but it was intolerable that he might love Mary.

He was fumbling at the door knob, too, while she tried not to sob. He found it and they went in and he stood, not knowing what to say or do. "I am sorry, Louise," he kept saying.

"There's nothing to be sorry for," she gasped. She did not look at him.

He took her hand to press it, but it lay lifeless in his palm and he let it go again. "This has been a trying evening on us all," he stumbled. "You'd better go to bed. I suppose I ought to stop at the Seaton house on my way home, so that I can tell Margaret just what's happened."

She turned from him and went upstairs, trying not to cry.

The cold air was comforting when he was outside again, the cold air and being alone. He would have liked to drive off into the night to have time to disentangle this strange web of affairs in his own house, but he knew he must not. He would stop by and see whether Tommy had gone home, and see what needed to be done for Thomas Seaton yet tonight, if anything could be done. At least it might comfort Margaret more than his presence if he came in saying that all was well there.

Christmas lights had been put out, the streets were still, when he turned in at the circular driveway of the big white house. No one had turned off the two flaming Christmas trees at either side of the door and they blazed on. The lights downstairs were still lit, and upstairs there was one light, in Thomas Seaton's own room.

He rang and no one answered, and trying the latch he found the door open and he walked in.

"Hello," Tom's voice called, his drunken voice, as Edward instantly recognized.

"It is I," Edward replied. He went to the door of the living room and saw Tom there, unsteady upon his feet, pacing back and forth, declaiming to Lewis Harrow, who sat sprawled but sober in a big chair, and to Tommy, his own son, who held a wineglass in his hands from which he drank in small gulps, trying not to show his distaste before his uncle.

"No one understood me except my father," Tom was mourning. "He knew how I felt when Daintree turned me down. Ever know I was in love with Lady Daintree of Montrose Hall? She

loved me, too, but her papa wouldn't see it and my mamma told me to come home. I came then, though if it had been now, I wouldn't. I went to my father. He said, 'Never mind, Tom, my son, there's lots of women in the world.' That's where he was wrong—women of course, but not one like my Dainty. A man doesn't live alone, of course—not by bread alone and all that. Fioretta Carosi knows, too. Ever see my Fioretta?"

"I've taken a look at her," Harrow said, with interest.

Upon this Edward came into the room. "Tommy, it is time for you to go home," he said coldly to his son. "Your mother will be worrying about you. Go now, this minute."

Tommy set down his glass. "I only came to help Uncle Tom."

"I will help him now," Edward said in the same cold voice, the voice that Tommy had recognized long ago as the voice of one almighty. "Tell your mother that I shall be home soon."

"But how am I to go?"

"I'll take you," Harrow said. He rose as he spoke. "The minister's upstairs, Ed—and so are Baynes and Sandra. I thought I'd better stay with Tom, who's in his cups, as you see."

Tom had let himself sink into his father's chair and was beginning to weep.

"I'll put him to bed," Edward said.

He stood while Harrow and Tommy left the room, and then he lifted Tom by the armpits and pulled him to his feet. "Come, Tom, you're going to bed."

"The kindest man," Tom was muttering. "The best God-damned father—always understand—"

Edward guided him firmly toward the stairs.

"Even said I could marry little Fioretta if I wanted to—know Fioretta Carosi, Ed? No, 'course you wouldn't know—I don't want to marry her—that's what I told him—it's a comedown."

Tom was clinging to the balustrade, trying to lift his foot for the stair. A door opened, and at the top of the stairs Baynes stood looking down. "Leave him to me, Ed," he called down softly. "I've

done this before—the night before your wedding, for the first time, but plenty of times since.”

“Who’s this Fioretta he talks about?” Edward demanded.

“John’s sister—didn’t you know?”

“Good God, no!”

“I didn’t tell you. I thought it would mess things up in the shop—but I thought maybe Margaret had told you.”

“Does she know?”

“Sandra told her.”

Supporting a now somnolent form, they took Tom upstairs, his head lying on Baynes’s shoulder. The two brothers looked at each other.

“Queer family we’ve married into,” Baynes said with a ghastly smile. “Leave him to me, now. I don’t undress him. I just pitch him on the bed. Sandra is in there with the old man. She might like it if you went in.”

He nodded toward Thomas Seaton’s room, and leaving him Edward tiptoed toward the half-open door.

Thomas Seaton lay on his great bed, dressed as he had been at the party, a triumphant smile upon his bearded lips. He had smiled as he died, and the smile held. Joseph Barclay knelt beside the bed, and Sandra stood, her face pale as stone and as immobile, looking down at her father. The minister did not move as Edward came in. He was praying and he finished his prayer.

“And if it be thy will, O Almighty God, receive unto thyself this soul. We who know nothing of that path which extends beyond our little world cannot see this soul struggling on its way. But Thou seest, and Thou dost forgive. In Thy name, Amen.”

Edward stood silent, until the prayer ended and Joseph Barclay rose to his feet. They shook hands silently. Then the minister said, “I have made all arrangements, I think, Haslatt. The men will be here in the morning to see to things. Mrs. Baynes here has told me what her father wanted. It seems he foresaw something like this.”

“I’ve never seen anybody dead before,” Sandra said suddenly. “It’s strange when it is my own father.”

"Death is not strange," Joseph Barclay said. "Nothing is as strange as life."

"He looks alive," Edward mused.

"He is alive!" Sandra cried. "I'll never believe he is dead. I won't let him be dead. I'll keep him alive thinking about him—forever."

Neither man answered this. Then the words smote Edward with meaning. So might Margaret too keep her father alive, thinking of him, forever.

"I can't do anything here," he murmured. "Baynes is with you, Sandra, and I had better go home to Margaret."

He went away forgetting to say good night, and carried with him the picture of that huge and heavy frame, that mammoth man, that tender father beloved by all his children, whose ghost they would not lay.

His house, when he stepped in the front door, seemed unnaturally still. The hall light burned, but the other rooms were dark. Even Margaret's room, he had noticed as he came up the drive, was unlighted, and the guest room where Mrs. Seaton had gone had been dark ever since they left her there, although Margaret, he supposed, must surely have been to see her mother before she slept. He hung his coat in the closet under the stair, and put his hat upon its shelf. Then he paused, halted by some instinct that he did not understand. Surely the house was too silent! He was not a man of intuition except where the few, the very few, he loved were concerned, but he was aware now of that intuition. Something was wrong.

He mounted the stairs, agitated in spite of his exhaustion, his heart beating wildly, about what he did not know, and hastening toward his own room, he put on the light. The door to Margaret's room was open slightly and now he went to it and threw it wide. She was there. The light fell on her sleeping form. He went near to her and reaching into the pocket where he kept his pipe and matches, he lit a match. The flame shone upon her face. She had

been weeping. Her lids were swollen, and the lashes were still wet. Now under the light she opened her eyes heavily.

"Ned—I waited so long."

"Is everything all right?" he cried.

She turned over and pushed back her loosened hair. "What do you mean?"

"The house feels queer."

"I haven't been out of my room except to go and see Mother. But she still didn't want me."

"Didn't you go to see Mark?"

She shook her head. "I thought of course he was asleep."

His first thought now for his son, he turned and went out of the room and across the hall. At the door of Mark's room he touched the light again and it came on softly under a shaded lamp. His eyes were already on the child's bed, and he tiptoed to it. Mark was safe, asleep and tranquil. In this night of death and sorrow he had remained in peace, unknowing. Leaning on the foot of the bed, Edward felt something under his hand and looking down he saw Mark's stocking. Some time after he had been put to bed the child had got up and hung his small stocking at the end of the crib. It dangled there, empty.

Edward's heart smote him. They had given up the habit of hanging stockings when the other children outgrew their babyhood, and had allowed the tree to be their Christmas symbol. But Mark must have heard about a stocking and feeling lonely, he had climbed out of bed and found his own and hung it, a sign of wanting something that he did not have. Oh, these children of his! So did Edward's heart cry out within his breast. How had he failed them? With all his love constantly awake and trembling over them, they were always going beyond him.

He tiptoed back to the door, intent upon returning to tell Margaret that the stocking must be filled somehow from the store accumulated for Mark tomorrow, when in the hall his eyes fell upon the door of Mary's room. It stood partly open and he paused. She

had taken during the last year to locking her door at night and when he had remonstrated at this, half hurt because she wanted to receive his good-night kiss downstairs, she had remained sweetly firm. "I'm really grown up now," she had replied.

"But you're at home," he had reminded her.

"I like my door locked," she had replied simply.

Now his instinct was roused again. Not Mark—then Mary? He prowled toward the door, half afraid lest she cry out against him. Yet she might have merely forgotten it in her weariness. He pushed it open and stood, listening for the sound of her breathing. He heard nothing. The room was still, the air warm. She had not opened the window.

He turned on the light. The room was empty, the bed not slept in.

"Margaret!" he called in a low voice.

She heard him instantly and came running in her nightgown, her hair flying over her shoulders. She saw the empty room, the smooth bed, and began to hasten here and there, while he stood staring and bewildered.

"Oh, the silly child!" she muttered.

She was opening drawers, the closet, a hatbox, a jewelry case.

"Oh, what has she done now!" she muttered.

Then she turned to him and flung her arms about him. "Ned, don't look like that."

"Where has she gone?" he asked.

"I don't know—I don't know! Oh, Ned, don't please look so!"

He flung her away from him. "I'm going up to The Eagle."

"No, don't—let's telephone first."

She ran downstairs, barefoot, and he heard her voice demanding over and over again Harrow's telephone number. He stood there, unmoving in the middle of his daughter's empty room. There was no answer from The Eagle. Harrow was not there. He had known the fellow would not be.

She came upstairs again. "Ned, if it's happened—"

"I must go and get the car," he said stupidly.

"No, you will not!" she cried. They were still keeping their voices low, mindful of the other children, mindful of her mother and of Mark. "You will not go! We'll hear. Maybe she's left a note."

She was searching the room again, and he tried to help her, but he felt dull and weary enough to die. His instinct was gone, and he did not know what to do next. There was no note to be found. Mary had never done what she was supposed to.

"I don't know where to turn," he said helplessly. "Where can I go to find her?"

"You shall not go," Margaret declared. "You shall stay here in our house. Come, Ned, come—you will drop." She pulled him by the hand into his room.

But he would not yield to her. "I cannot just accept this—as if it were nothing. Let us think together—where would they go? It is not too late."

"It is too late," she insisted. "Look at the sky!"

It was dawn, and the sky was breaking crimson at the horizon.

"You don't care," he muttered. "You've never cared about her."

"I do care," she answered and began to weep. "I care as much as you do, but I know her better than you ever can. She has got to leave you, Ned—that's what you cannot and will not understand."

"I can bear her leaving me," he insisted, "but not like this and with him!"

"But you must see that it is only like this—and with him—that she can really leave you." They were sitting on the edge of his bed now and her arms were around him.

"You can't understand her," he said. "You can't understand her because you never have loved her as well as the others."

"I understand her because she is the one most like me," she retorted. "She has gone through what I did. She's loved you too

much, Ned—as I loved my own father. She hasn't been able to find someone just like you to marry."

"Don't talk like that."

"Oh, Ned, it's true—and she has chosen somebody utterly different from you—so that she can be free of you. Oh, she doesn't know what she's done—she doesn't understand."

"How is it that you understand?" he demanded.

"Because I was like that, Ned." She flung out her arms, imploring him.

"You mean you loved your father—better than me?"

"I always loved the kind of man he was."

"Which I could never be!"

"And that is why I wanted to marry you, to be free of him—can you see that, Ned? Try to see it—for Mary's sake!"

"Then you haven't really loved me all these years!"

"I have—I have! Ned, don't look at me like that, darling! Because I'm going to love you now as I've never known how to love you. My heart has let go. There's only you."

She folded her arms about him again but he did not reply to her words of love. Yet somehow she had healed him. Mary had so loved him, her father, that she had needed to cut the bond between them. How slow, how blind he was, that he had not seen before that what she must have was the freedom of her own heart!

"I hope she will want to come back," he said humbly.

"If you let her go, of course she will," Margaret comforted him.

"It will take time for me to stick having Lew Harrow here—my son-in-law, good God!"

"Don't think about him."

They sat a long while in silence while the room slowly brightened to dawn. The sun came over the horizon a globe of melted fire and the snow grew pink. Not a merry Christmas, he thought heavily, and then he remembered.

"Margaret, Mark's gone and hung his stocking all by himself."

She rose swiftly. "Oh, the poor babe—where is it?"

"At the foot of his bed. He mustn't find it empty."

"Of course not. I'll rob some of the things I was going to put on the tree for him."

She opened a closet and chose half a dozen small wrapped packages and a jumping jack. Together they stole out of the room and across the hall and standing side by side at the foot of his bed they stuffed the stocking full, and out of the top the jumping jack peered, laughing.

In his bed Mark did not wake. He lay high on his single pillow, his arms outspread, the lashes dark upon his red cheeks.

"How he sleeps!" Edward whispered.

"As if he never meant to wake," Margaret whispered back.

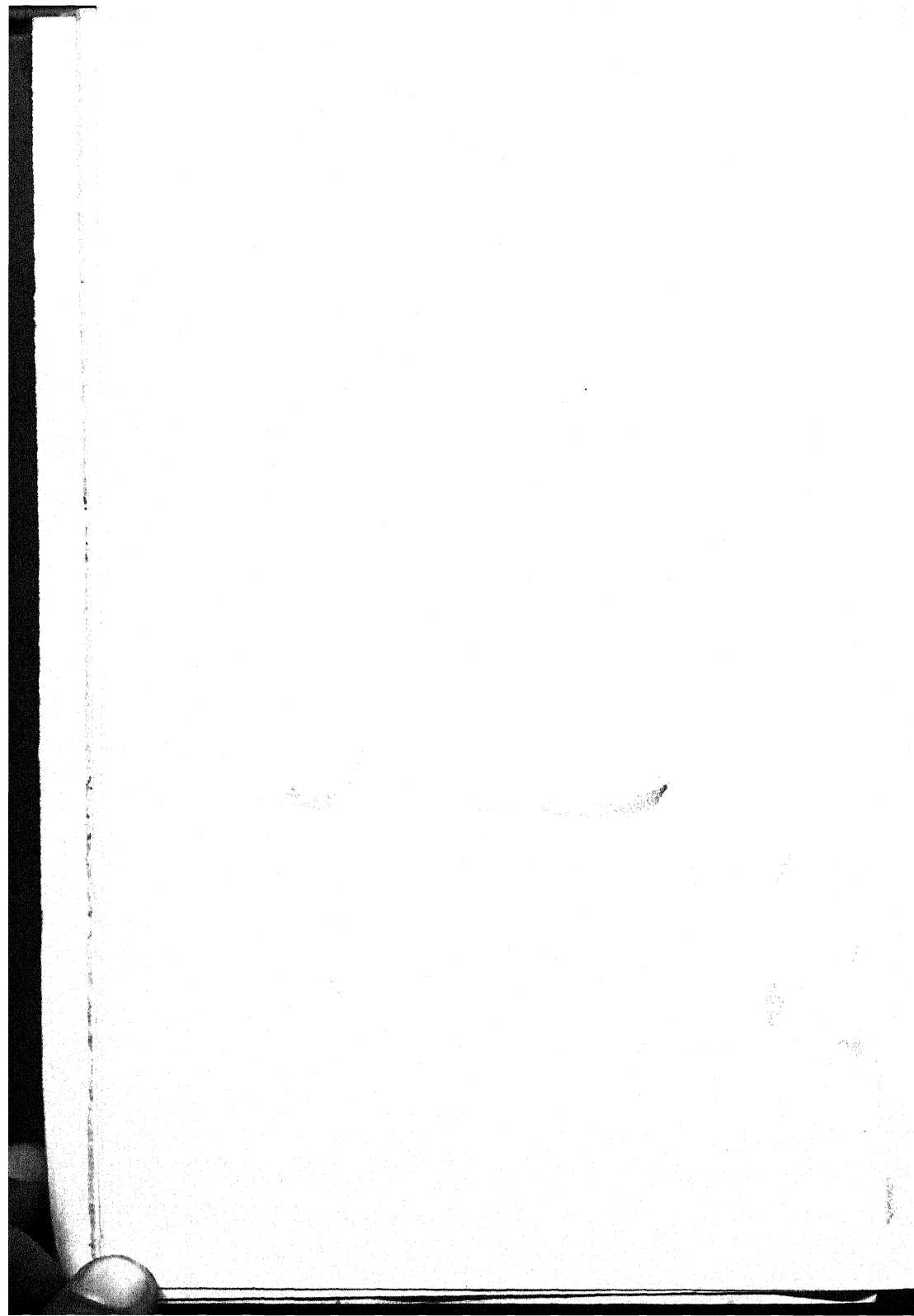
"Don't say that," he said sharply under his breath.

"Oh, Ned—you're overwrought—I didn't mean—"

"I know—forgive me."

He crawled into his bed a few minutes later, agreeing with her that they must try to sleep a little while, with the day ahead. Sleep, he told himself, was impossible, until he heard from Mary where they were—and when they were coming back. But he slept at last, and was tortured by dreams of losing Mary somewhere, a small girl who had never grown up, and of searching for her and not being able to find her. Then somehow the little girl she had once been turned to Mark as he was now and it was his son for whom he searched and whom he could not find.

IV





THE STILLNESS of Granite Mountain was rent by the war whoops of two shrill voices. Edward Haslatt looked up mildly from a magazine he was reading, while he waited for his wife and daughter to return from their inspection of some new garments in another room. His twin grandsons, in full Indian regalia, tore around one of the stone buttresses of this fantastic house and raced out of sight. He sighed and returned to the magazine. It was a popular one, full of pictures that he disliked because he thought them meaningless exposures. He had never allowed himself to be interested in the physical aspects of women other than his wife, and now he was well past the age for that sort of thing. For this he was grateful. The struggle of the flesh was over. This was not to say that he did not have proper relations with Margaret. He could and did, as often as he felt inclined, which was decently less often as the years went, and she met his inclination gracefully, if not eagerly. Indeed so smoothly were they attuned now, as they stood upon the brink of old age together, that he occasionally felt that he would like to write a book on marriage from the man's point of view. There was something original in the idea, as he toyed with it. It would have to be done anonymously, of course. He knew he would never do it. Self-revelation, even namelessly, was impossible for him.

Though his life as a modestly successful publisher of books had been spent among writers of all varieties, he continued to be amazed, amused and sometimes repelled by their willingness to

strip the covers from their most secret parts. Yet sometimes he envied them the relief of complete revelation, even while he knew he could never achieve it. For one thing, Margaret would certainly know about it, and he shrank from such exposure, even to her. She knew him through and through, of that he was well aware, and yet they had never put each other into words, as once she said they must. He had never learned her trick of ready speech. Perhaps she, however, had learned to read through silence.

He put down the magazine restlessly and getting up he went to the stupendous window of paneless glass which Lewis had built so many years ago. Such windows were uncommon then, and visitors from Chedbury had told each other privately that they would not like to live in all outdoors. What was a house for if not to hide those inside from those outside? Chedbury had not changed much in all these years. Even the second world war had not changed the people much. Young men had gone away and some had not come back, and Chedbury was still wrangling over the sort of monument they should put up to the dead. Tom Seaton wanted a white marble shaft in the middle of the green, but Edward had violently opposed such a monstrosity.

"That's because Mark wasn't killed," Tom had said rudely.

Edward had gazed at him over his glasses. "I believe you, too, did not suffer a personal loss."

"At least I went over and saw our men dying," Tom had retorted, "and Fioretta's nephew was killed."

It was true. John Carosi had lost his son in the Battle of the Bulge. Edward, who had been quarreling with him only the day before over the fourth strike at the shop, had put on his hat and coat and for the first time in his life had gone to South Chedbury. It was the week after Christmas and there was the usual snow on the ground and the driving had been bad, even though he no longer drove himself. His frequent trips to New York demanded a chauffeur, now that he was no longer young.

He had found John sitting in his shirt sleeves in a tiny parlor, his

fists clenched on his knees as he stared at a picture of Jack in his uniform. John had grown heavy in his middle age and he was sweating with agony, the tears running down his cheeks. Upstairs his wife was wailing among his daughters.

"John, I'm very sorry to hear this," Edward had said at once.

He had found it difficult to meet John's dark and suffering eyes.

"Sit down, Mr. Haslatt," he said without getting up.

Edward had sat down, his hat and stick between his knees. He felt his skin prickling with pain.

"Jack was a fine boy," he said.

"A great boy," Carosi agreed.

"I wish there was something I could do," Edward went on. "I know there isn't, but for my own sake I just had to come and tell you that I—that I would really have done anything to prevent this."

"It's good of you," Carosi said. "I just have to sweat it through."

Silence had fallen between them. He wished that he could assure Carosi that it was a good way for a boy to die—sweet and right to die for one's country, and all that—but he had not been able to say the words. Death was neither sweet nor right for young men like Jack, full of life and mischief, and he could not bring himself to say a thing he did not believe. He sat with his heart aching in his bosom and thinking of Mark, who unless the vile war ended, would have to get into it.

But the war ended abruptly. Two years later to Edward's dismay Mark decided to enlist anyway, in the air force, "to get his share over with," he said.

Edward told John Carosi in the shop. "I hope he doesn't get ground into the mud, the way mine did," Carosi had answered. "That's what keeps my wife cryin'. There wasn't nothing to bring home to bury."

Edward had not been able to answer this, and before he could conquer the sickness in the pit of his stomach Carosi had turned away and had said brusquely, "I may as well tell you that the union's goin' to push for an increase again."

For once Edward had welcomed the quarrel. "I shall have to stop publishing books at this rate, and you know it. People won't buy novels that cost three and four dollars apiece."

"They still buy Harrow's," Carosi retorted.

"You know I've always liked to publish new writers, young ones," Edward said. "This way I don't dare take the risk."

"That's not my business," Carosi replied.

"It would be your business if Haslatt Brothers failed."

"Personally I'd be sorry, but the union would take care of me," Carosi had said firmly.

. . . He lost his fight with the union and wages went up again. What he had said was true. In any struggle the new and the young went down and sorrowfully he rejected manuscripts of young and awkward writers. He was safe enough only so long as the half dozen or so of his best-selling older authors kept alive. Their books were not as good as they had been—even Harrow's were not. Writers were, he supposed, confounded by the times.

So, for that matter, was he. Mark was still in the air force and he wished he would come home. What was the use of risking one's life every day to carry food into Berlin? He had never wanted the boy to be a pilot. But a son paid no heed nowadays to what his father wanted. His mind harked back, upon this, to his own father. Remembering that kind gray figure, now so long dust save for the spirit of this memory, he took pride in thinking that he had never really defied his own father. Then his sense of justice reminded him that neither had he, as a young man, been confronted with the issues of life and death that faced Mark now.

His imagination, always slow, was nevertheless strong when it was lit by love, and he thought of Mark waking in the morning, day after day, to consider, however swiftly, whether night would see him still alive. The lift was as safe as it could be made, Edward supposed, and yet he had made it his duty to know how many young men actually were killed in this cold combat with a country monstrous in its silent power. He was not for a moment confused

by any illusions. It was not to feed hungry people that Mark continually risked his life. Power was being matched against power, even in this trivial way, and his son—oh, agony to think of it—was merely expendable.

He heard footsteps outside the door and he turned from the window, glad to be distracted from his constant and secret worry over Mark. Margaret came in ready to go home. She had put on her hat and the jacket to her new spring suit. It was a matter of course nowadays that she bought her clothes in New York, and this suit was the result of her going with him last week. She and Sandra had gone to some fancy place and picked it out, and at the same time she had bought some things for Mary. He took enormous pride in Margaret's good looks. It was an achievement when a woman kept as slim, or almost as slim, as she had been and without wrinkles. Tom's wife, Fioretta, had run to fat, in the way of Italian women.

Strange marriage that! Thomas Seaton was only cold in his grave when Tom had suddenly decided to marry the pretty Italian girl who was John Carosi's youngest sister, twenty-six years younger than he, and almost as many years younger than Tom. There had been no wedding. Tom had informed the family one day that he and Fioretta would be married and sail at once for Italy, where he might stay a year. He had stayed four months, and meantime Mrs. Seaton, restless in the big empty house, had gone to live in Paris with Dorothea, her divorced sister. Tom had come back suddenly because Fioretta was pregnant and he wanted his child born an American. He had declared that he wanted no children, but that Fioretta, incurably maternal, had cheated him. She had continued to cheat him amiably, and the Seaton house was noisy with three rather spoiled but extremely beautiful little girls.

Edward was secretly fond of his Italian sister-in-law, while realizing that it was a comedown for the Seaton family. But the new times were very queer. Nothing was as it had once been. His own

mother, though it had been no business of hers, had made a fuss over the marriage. "I never thought we'd be connected with South Chedbury through the Seaton's," she had said acidly.

She never knew either, he supposed, how nearly Baynes and Sandra had come to a divorce five years ago. Sandra had even gone to Reno. As he had surmised, this time it was money, and no other than Harold Ames, still president of a New York bank. It had not come off, however. The directors had met and after violent argument had informed Harold that it would make people lose confidence in the bank if he divorced his old wife to marry a woman who though not young, perhaps, at least looked sinfully young, and if he persisted, another president would be chosen. Harold, confronted with loss of prestige and mindful of his bald head, at which Sandra had unwisely already poked some fun, withdrew prudently before anything was made public.

Sandra had come home at once, pretending that she had only been on a trip. She brought back, with her infallible instinct, a novel about New Mexico written by a young veteran who, dying with tuberculosis, had gone to end his days in the sun, and she had been frank to forestall scolding.

"I see now that Hal only loved me as a sort of shadow sister of yours," she had told Margaret. "I was a fool," she added honestly, "and I shan't be one again. Baynes is an archangel and too good for me."

Baynes was, in a dry way, a saint, Edward admitted. After their mother had died of double pneumonia the winter of unprecedented snows, when Chedbury was without light or fuel for nearly a week, and the whole of New England was winterbound, Baynes had taken Louise to the New York office, where she had become a perfectionist with the adding machine and had risen to be treasurer of the company. Never again had she or Edward referred to the single dreadful night when she had revealed herself of a heart. He continued mildly affectionate toward her, as his sister, and she grew less and less affectionate toward anybody. She main-

tained a two-room apartment in New York, furnished with her mother's things, and developed a zeal for museums, and had become, to Edward's astonishment, something of an expert in Japanese art. She had a few friends, equally absorbed, and he supposed she was happy. At any rate, he had never been able to do anything about Louise.

Margaret was drawing on her pearl-gray gloves. The gray suit, light enough almost to match her white hair, was, as she well knew, singularly good with her pink cheeks and blue eyes. Her little vanities pleased him and made him love her the more fondly. Beside her Mary looked like a warm dark little dove—a darling dove at that, very pleasant in her swirling brown skirts. Edward liked the new long skirts, after the years of tight and narrow ones, from whose knees he had so often averted his eyes.

"Shall I tell him?" Margaret asked of her daughter.

"Tell me what?" Edward demanded. "Of course I'm to be told."

"Mary is going to have another baby," Margaret announced.

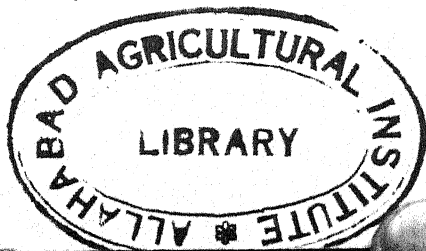
Mary smiled at her father. The marriage, contrary to all his expectations and even wishes, had been a very happy one. Enveloped in her husband's worship, Mary had grown softly dependent and willfully clinging as she left her girlhood behind.

"Lew is going to be surprised," she said sweetly.

"When's he coming back?"

"Next week."

Harrow had flown to London to quarrel with his English publishers over a cut in royalties. The internal troubles of a socialist Britain were none of his affair, he had declared loudly over the transatlantic telephone, and he did not intend to be impoverished by Englishmen. It was not as if he were a Socialist or a Communist or any of these new kinds of persons. As the son of a drunkard and a laundry woman he knew enough about people to believe that they would always sponge on others who had regular jobs, and he considered socialism a delusion, devised by the sons of the rich



out of guilty conscience and idleness. Anybody else, he often said, would know better. People would take all they could get, just as he did.

"I thought you weren't going to risk this business again," Edward grumbled. "When the twins were born I certainly remember hearing Lewis say he wouldn't let you have any more children."

"He did say that," Mary replied. Her dark eyes, full of soft mischief, looked into his with deep and worldly wisdom.

"You didn't embark on this purposely, did you?" Edward inquired.

"Not really," she said, ambiguous in his presence. Her soft red lips folded with some of her old stubbornness.

Ah, well, she had grown very far away from him. The days when he had felt her very flesh was his were long gone. She had become a pretty, rather distant woman, who stirred in him only now and then the memories of a small oversensitive girl. If he had lost her there seemed nevertheless to be some sort of increasing friendship between her and her mother, though less a mother-daughter relationship, perhaps, than that of two women who were able at last to like one another. He did not pretend to understand it, especially when he remembered past antagonism and how often he had tried to console his child.

"Well, good-by," he said, sighing. "You'll have to make your own peace with your husband. At least the doctors will be better now than they were ten years ago. I suggest, however, that you don't make it twins again."

Both women laughed, which was what he had intended them to do. He stooped to kiss his daughter, his dry lips frosty and not touching the rich red of her full mouth. He had a horror of lipstick staining his clipped white mustache.

"Good-by, darling," Mary said comfortably. "If you see the Indians on the way down the mountain, please tell them to come and get ready for lunch. I wish you'd stay but Mother says you won't."

"No, no. I like my meals in peace," he declared.

From the comfortable sedan car he looked at his daughter as she stood on the stone threshold of her home. The wind was blowing her short brown curls and except for the content and the wisdom in her eyes she might have been a girl. Certainly she still looked young enough to be Harrow's daughter. He waved and then spoke to the chauffeur as the car moved away.

"Be careful how you go around the bends. My grandsons are probably hiding behind a rock somewhere."

Under the robe his hand sought Margaret's, as usual. He liked to sit beside her, hand in hand, and watch the familiar landscape of Chedbury rise nearer as they descended.

"I wondered why Mary wanted all those negligees," Margaret said, smiling.

"Is it safe to have a Caesarean after thirty-five?" he inquired anxiously. It had been apparent ten years ago when the twins were ready to make their dual appearance that Mary's frame was too delicate for normal functions—too delicate, he did not doubt, to be married at all to the grossness of a man like Lewis Harrow, but on that dark picture he would not allow himself to dwell. He had not been able to sleep the night after Mary's wedding. What was the fellow doing to his little child? It had been almost better not to know where she was, the night she ran away. But the next morning had brought them news in her own voice over the telephone. They were in some little town in Maine, having driven all night, and they were at that moment going to be married before a justice of the peace.

"Stop!" he had commanded that soft determined voice ringing in his ear. "You mustn't do this, Mary! I forbid it—absolutely!"

"I will do it," she had replied and had hung up the receiver. He heard the click which cut her off again and he had turned to Margaret, who was standing beside him, her hands clasped tightly at her throat.

"She's getting married now!" he had gasped.

"Where?" Margaret had cried.

He had stared at her blankly. "I don't know!" Only then had he realized that Mary had not even spoken the name of the town. Ah, purposely she had not told him the name of the town!

She and Lewis Harrow had not come home for nearly two years. They had gone to England and to France. When they did come home to The Eagle it was to rest and to prepare for the birth of the children. He had not been able to believe that the swollen little figure was that of his Mary, his child. For a brief while, when she lay at death's door before the doctor had decided to operate, he had reclaimed her again.

"You shouldn't have married her!" he had exclaimed in utmost agitation to Harrow. "This is your—your—excessive vitality."

In the midst of his own terror Harrow had paused to stare at him and then to burst into loud and unexplained laughter.

When Mary was saved, however, and he went in to see his grandsons, he felt no return of his brief recognition. There she lay, pale and placidly triumphant in her bed, a robust if small infant in either arm. He had been compelled to readjust himself quickly.

"Well, well," he had said with something more than his usual vigor.

"Nice, aren't they?" she had asked.

"They look healthy," he had replied with reserve.

They were healthy. He believed that his grandsons were over-stuffed with vitamins. It was difficult, moreover, to talk to two boys, and one could never get them separately. One boy, he sometimes thought, he could have interested in something, say in stamps, or even in some of the types at the printing shop, but two were disconcerting. They began to romp at any moment—roughhousing, they called it. And a grandparent had no chance nowadays in competition with radio programs and comic books. These preoccupations of the immature he deeply disapproved, and yet

such was the softness of his heart that he could not forbear picking up a handful of the wretchedly printed books from the newsstands where he bought the morning papers on his days in New York. Two or three times, troubled by the effect of the lurid pictures on his descendants, he had tried to read some of the pages and had not the least notion of what they were about. He was appalled at the taste of his grandsons. There must be, he told himself, something in these comics that he did not see, just as he could not see what Mark had enjoyed in his endless evenings about town, aimlessly, or so he feared, pursuing pleasure. But at the thought of Mark, his heart forbade judgment.

A yell surpassing any he had ever heard before broke off his thoughts. The car came to a violent stop, and two painted heathen jabbered at the window.

"What are they saying?" he demanded of Margaret.

"Give them each a dime," she said, smiling. "They are pretending to hold us up."

"But isn't it very bad for them to think they can succeed?" he asked, anxious as always for their morals.

"It doesn't mean anything," she said comfortably and felt for her own purse.

"Oh, I'll do it," he said with some irritation, "if it has to be done, that is."

He took out his wallet and opening the window he gazed into two round and ruddy faces, so charming in smiles that his heart softened again and trying not to let Margaret see, he took out two quarters instead of dimes and pressed them into the filthiest hands he had touched for years.

"Mind you, this is all against my principles," he said earnestly in the slightly didactic voice of which he was almost entirely unconscious, except when, as now, it grated surprisingly on his own ears. "You shouldn't hold up anybody—most of all your own poor old grandfather. I need my money for my old age. What if I have to go to the poorhouse?"

Compunction appeared in the two pairs of dark eyes.

"You can come and live with us," Peter suggested.

"We'll come and bring you home," Paul added.

"You still want the quarters, I notice," he said dryly, although his heart was further softened to the point, he told himself, of folly.

"Just for the present we need them," Paul said sweetly, clutching his booty.

They let out their war whoops and seeing them dash into the underbrush, he remembered their mother's message and shouted after them, "Go home to luncheon!" He sank back panting. "I doubt they can hear anyone, they're making so much noise."

"Their stomachs will lead them homeward," Margaret replied. She felt for his hand again and leaning toward him she kissed his ear while the car started forward. He glanced involuntarily at the little mirror. The chauffeur's eyes were set coldly ahead, thank God.

"Now what's that for?" he demanded in a guarded voice.

"Because you gave them quarters, Ned," she replied. They looked at each other for a long minute, her eyes were soft and still so blue, and then he was abashed.

"Oh, well," he grumbled, "it's only once—though of course they are utterly without discipline."

He held her hand firmly and was conscious of deep inner happiness.

This welling inner happiness was something that had grown only as he approached what was commonly called old age. In years he knew that indeed he was an aging if not an old man. Mark, his youngest son, was twenty his next birthday and Mark had been a belated child. A child almost perfect, he often reflected with something like fatuousness. He had spent much time upon Mark's education. The other children had grown up in the usual round of schools and college, but Mark had, so to speak, been hand grown.

It had been a disappointment he did not acknowledge even to

himself that this dearest son had not shown the slightest sign, as yet, of interest in the firm of Haslatt Brothers. Instead, by some astonishing twist of inheritance Tommy, after deciding not to marry Dinny and then sowing an agitating number of wild oats in that unhappy period between wars, had settled down into the family firm with a gaiety combined with a cynical prudence that forced Edward to realize that perhaps he had produced a publisher superior to himself by nature. By a process of inheritance far beyond the understanding of man, Tommy combined in himself his father's love of books and his uncle Baynes's instinct, or flair. Sandra loudly proclaimed Tommy's virtues and claimed him as the son she herself should have had, if she had only had the sense to know it earlier. After years of refusing to have any children Sandra now at a lean and chic middle age wished that she had let nature take its course with her, although she added, "Nature on the loose would probably have produced something that looked neither like Baynes or me." She remembered the grimness of the remote Uncle Henry Haslatt, now long dead, and declared finally that his visage alone made her content to be childless. Nevertheless she adored her Tommy, and was far more proud than Margaret had been when he chose as his wife the prettiest debutante of her year in New York.

After this marriage Sandra had tried to force Tom and Fioretta out of the old Seaton house, because she maintained that Fioretta made it look like something in South Chedbury whereas Diantha would have made it what it had been designed to be, a family seat.

Edward had taken the side of Tom and Fioretta, however. He was grateful to her for marrying Tom and removing him as a bad influence upon his elder son, and therefore even remotely, perhaps, from Mark. At any rate it was only after Tom's marriage that the great change had appeared in Tommy.

Thinking of Fioretta now he drew his old gold watch from his pocket.

"We have time to stop by Tom's, if you like. I don't suppose

Mary would mind if we mention her condition. Fioretta is always so pleased at the prospect of a new child in the family."

"Very well," Margaret replied, her voice pleasant.

Some moments later Edward leaned toward the chauffeur and directed his stop at the white painted gate which Tom had set between the stone posts in order to keep his offspring within the bounds of Fioretta's hearty cries. Fioretta sensibly had not wanted the house changed and it looked as it always had, a little less spotless than of old, perhaps, as to white paint. The flowers, too, had degenerated from lilies and English tree roses to a general effect of zinnias and marigolds, and he disapproved the row of tall sunflowers against the dignified background of the house itself. Fioretta kept chickens in the back yard, and considered sunflower seeds conducive to eggs.

As usual she saw them through the window and came running out to greet them warmly. She had been plump when Tom married her, a darkly rosy creature with huge black eyes and a red mouth. Now she was frankly more than plump. She still loved the bright deep orange hues and crimsons of her girlhood and they somehow became her in spite of spread.

"Uncle Ed—Auntie Margaret!" she cried in her fresh voice. The one sign of her insecurity in this family was that she had never brought herself to call them by their first names. Only when the children grew old enough to talk had she solved the problem by calling them what she taught the children to say.

"Come in, do! I've just got lunch on the table—special ravioli Tom does love. Ah, now, sit down! For what else should you come just when I tell the girl to dish up?"

"We can't, dear," Margaret said gently. "Ned doesn't digest starches, and luncheon is waiting for us, I'm sure. And you know how it puts the cook out if we don't come home. We just wanted to see you and the children and Tom, if he's home, to tell you the latest family news."

"The children are coming home from school this minute and

Tom is mending the grape arbor. I tell him every year we should have more grapes so I can make all our wine at home. It is better for Tom than the boughten stuff. My poppa taught me how to make it so good, like they do at home in Italy."

"It is delicious," Margaret said.

"Now," Fioretta said in her cozy busy voice, "what's the news?"

"We've just come from The Eagle and Mary told us today that she is going to have a baby." Margaret spoke simply as though to a child.

"My God, how nice!" Fioretta's great eyes rolled and she threw up her hands. "So she's goin' to get ahead of me? She's goin' to have the next baby. I'm goin' to tell Tom. He won't let me have any more little babies. What you think of that? And me with my arms empty! My children are all too big. You know what? That Viola of mine she's kissing a boy already. Can you imagine!"

Fioretta flung back her head and laughter rolled from her rich red mouth.

Edward as usual was silent. He basked in this generous presence of Fioretta. Actually they had very little to say to each other. Fioretta had never, so far as he knew, read a book. John Carosi, now, was a reader. In later years he had often quarreled with his employer over the books published by Haslatt Brothers. Last year, when Edward had chosen to publish *The Rights of Employers in a Democracy*, written by the head of a great utility firm, John had thrown his gray cap on the floor one morning when Edward came into the shop.

"Mr. Haslatt, I don't work the press on that book!"

"Very well, John," Edward had replied. "I'll give it to one of the other men."

"I don't work in this shop," John had declared next.

"I don't want you to stop with me any longer than you wish," Edward had replied with dignity. "But I do reserve the right to publish two sides of any question. Don't forget I was entirely willing to publish *The Union and the Worker* last year."

"There can't be two sides to the right," John said.

"There are two sides to everything," Edward had retorted. He had proceeded through the shop, examining, with eyes grown quick and shrewd through the years, the presses pounding out the books he had chosen to present to the world. He had steadfastly resisted both Baynes and Tommy on the matter of enlarging the works.

"I do not intend to publish more books," he said at least several times a month. "Better ones, yes, every year—but no more."

"Come next Sunday then, please," Fioretta was urging. "I will make something special for you, Uncle Ed, not starch, a beef stew like something in Italy. Please, please!"

The children had reached home and came swarming out in a dark brood, all of them more Italian than English in their looks. Their eyes were lively, their voices piercing, and their health apparent in every move and word. They surrounded their mother and hugged her ardently while she laughed. "Look, now, at my monkeys. Children, you should beg Uncle Ed to come to Sunday dinner!"

"Uncle Ed, please."

"Auntie Margaret, make him."

He was inevitably pleased at their loud desire to have his company, though why he did not know, for he found very little to say to children at any time.

"Now why do you want me to come?" he demanded, mildly jocular. "I can't run around with you and I don't play any games."

Dark eyes met dark eyes and silence fell.

"Speak, children," Fioretta commanded with the warm imperiousness born of absolute love. "Say what is in your hearts. Don't be afraid."

Viola threw back her heavy curls. "I'll tell you why, Uncle Ed—we all feel you like us."

"There!" Fioretta cried admiringly. "Isn't that the truth! Nice the way she said it!"

"Very nice!" he admitted, and putting out his hand he touched the child's warm olive cheek.

"Lovely," Margaret said tenderly, "and we will come. Now you must all go and have your luncheon."

The ardent children left their mother and pressed around them, and upon this picture in the warm spring sunshine Tom appeared, the father of this family, to be sure, and yet always seeming somewhat puzzled and even astonished by what he had brought almost unwittingly into existence.

Lean and sandy hued as ever, he wore an overall of khaki color and in his hand he held a pruning knife. "They'll strangle you," he said. "I know what it's like. They try to choke me every day of their lives."

He waved the knife, pretending to stay them as they swarmed now toward him at the sound of his voice. He elbowed the older ones aside ruthlessly and opened his arms to his youngest daughter. "Come here, Baby," he said. "You're the only one that can kiss me. Here on the cheek, please!"

She planted a noisy kiss at the spot he indicated and Margaret laughed. "Tom, Tom, I wonder that our father doesn't rise from his grave!"

Fioretta turned solemn. "You think the old man wouldn't like it?"

"He'd love it, bless him," Margaret said. "He'd love you, Fioretta. Bless you, too."

She kissed Fioretta's round and rosy cheek. "We all do, darling. Don't mind me. And if I say anything you don't understand just forget it. Tom knows what I mean and he'll tell you."

"Aren't you going to stop for lunch?" Tom demanded.

"No, dear. We're coming Sunday."

Fioretta suddenly bethought herself of the news. "Tom, what you think? Mary is going to have a baby! Now, Tom, I ask you, why can she have a baby and not me?"

"Shut up, Fioretta," he answered with affection. "We've got

more than we need now and there'll be an accident or two. I know you."

"Aw, Poppa, we'd like a new baby!" Viola pleaded.

"You just wait, my girl," Tom told his daughter. "You'll have your own all too soon."

He turned to his sister. "Meg, do you think Mary ought, when you consider the twins?"

"It's too late now," Margaret said with the tranquillity that was the chief sign of her years. "We'll just have to keep prodding Lew to take care of her. He means to, but he forgets when he's writing, as usual, his greatest novel."

Tom's thin and handsome lip lifted in something like a sneer. "Count upon it, Ed, there'll be a childbirth in the book, a husband, like as not, hanging over his dying wife's bed, and moaning that he'd rather have lost the child."

"Don't joke, Tom," Margaret said sharply.

Fioretta, listening, was suddenly angry. "Ain't he wicked? My God, sometimes I think I got the worst man in the world! Mary won't die—what the devil!"

When she was angry and in the bosom of the family Fioretta returned wholeheartedly to South Chedbury. Indignation burned in the hot gaze she now bestowed upon her husband.

"Shut up, Fioretta," Tom said, from habit. "Well, we'll be looking for you Sunday, Ed."

They turned away, knowing that until they left Tom's brood would delay in the sunshine, and sitting in the car again, hand in hand, they rode in silence, each aware of warmth in the other's heart.

"Do you really think your father would have approved South Chedbury in his house?" Edward asked.

"Of course it couldn't have been in his day," she replied. "Things were so defined then, somehow. Mother would have made it impossible for Fioretta. But if it had been Mother who died instead of Father, I think he could have lived there quite happily

with Fioretta, growing drowsy in the grape arbor, drinking her wine and spotting his waistcoat more and more—and the little girls would have loved him extravagantly.”

“They love everything extravagantly,” he murmured.

He was surprised at her reply.

“Do you know, Ned, I’ve come to believe in extravagant love—it’s the only thing that makes life in this world possible. Maybe Fioretta’s children will teach us all.”

He knew the deep distress in her mind these days. She had given up much that she had once done. After the war she had even given up Red Cross work. “It all seems useless,” she had said to him one night. “It’s just patchwork. There has to be something different in the world, a new approach to the whole of life.”

They talked together now more than they ever had. He looked back on his earlier years with a sort of wonder. He had been so busy when his children were young that he had very little time for talk, or indeed for anything except the anxieties of a livelihood for those whom he loved and had too little time to enjoy. It was he alone, or so he had felt, who stood between them and the overwhelming world.

One of his most successful books had been written by an explorer in the jungles of Sumatra, an adventuring sort of fellow whom he had heartily disliked when he met him at a dinner Baynes and Sandra had given for him in New York when the book was published. The jungle, however, Edward had never forgotten. It had crept up on him in the night for years until he had been able to identify it with the overwhelming world he feared. Stoutly conservative, even to the extent of present distress over the socialism now rampant in England, he would have declared himself at all times unafraid of the insecurities of extreme individualism. Yet the nightmare of the encroaching jungle had beset him until one night in his wakefulness he had confided to Margaret the recurrence of the dream.

"I seem to be walking along a narrow path, enclosed in walls of the most livid green trees and vines. They aren't ordinary greenery—nothing like what we have here in New England. They're horrible, they keep growing new branches and tentacles. The roots of the trees are not even decent. They're like great sucking mouths, clutching the earth and draining it dry. The further I go—and I must go on—I can't help myself, it seems—the tighter the green walls press around me, and I can't see ahead. You are following behind me—sometimes just you and Mark, sometimes all of you—sometimes lately only Mark. I keep fighting off the horrible green tendrils reaching out. But they get me at last and I wake, strangling."

Margaret, waked from sleep, had listened, her eyes startled. "You're worrying about something," she declared. "You haven't told me everything."

"I've told you all I know," he had protested in honesty.

For the next few months she had persuaded him toward going to a psychiatrist, which he had resisted with profound conviction that such stuff was all charlatanry. In the end he had gone, however, commanded by Wynne, his doctor these many years.

"Your blood pressure is far too high, and yet you're as lean as a hound dog," Wynne had told him. "It isn't overeating that's doing it. It's whatever is gnawing at your mind. You're a born worrier like your New England ancestors. Go and have a talk with some professional—unless you can confess to a Catholic priest."

Confession was impossible to Edward's Protestant mind, and he had in the end made a carefully noncommittal appointment with an unknown though highly recommended name in New York. There he had gone soon after the inevitability of the war had burst upon his dismayed and terrified consciousness. Dr. Hastings had proved a tall, spare, pleasantly cold-looking gentleman who had listened respectfully to Edward's halting account of his nightmare. A succession of detached though acute questions had led



after two hours or so to a conclusion that had been immensely helpful.

"There is nothing wrong with you, Mr. Haslatt," Hastings had said. "You seem an exceptionally well-balanced and disciplined person. What you are suffering from is a disease called modern times. You, like all of us, have no security. Our American way of life so far does not provide it. Whether this is good or bad is beside the point. I am no moralist. But you have to recognize that though you are by nature and choice an individualist of the strongest dye, yet the fact is you are unconsciously frightened of the present hazards of extreme individualism, even while you reject anything else. You must learn to accept insecurity. As long as you live our society will not provide it for you. Say to yourself, 'I have an ample income and a satisfying wife'—you are sure you are telling me the truth there?"

"Completely," Edward replied. "I am what is called a one-woman man—that is, in my wife I have found all women. She is beautiful and intelligent."

"Very unusual," Dr. Hastings had said in a dry voice. "Such being the case, I am sure you can deal with your own fears of insecurity. Consider it part of the world state of mind, the atmosphere of our generation."

He had left the doctor's office strangely lighthearted. It was true that in the midst of the hazards of business he had always made a good and on the whole increasingly ample income, though he was sound rather than rich. He had never lost anyone he loved, his parents he supposed scarcely coming under the category of real love. Margaret had passed through her middle years without the neuroticism to which he had heard women were susceptible, and she did not find him unpleasing in their intimate relations, even as she grew older. He tried, of course, to be considerate. He had even bought a book on menopause in women, which she had snatched away from him, laughing at him as she did so.

"Don't read up on me, Ned!" she had exclaimed. "I'm as normal as possible, thank God, and I still love you."

She had been a perfect wife, or as nearly so as a mortal man could expect. Her few faults were negligible—a tendency to be careless about the house as she grew older, dust and so on seeming less important to her while it became more important to him, and his clothes were not always sent to be pressed when he wished them to be. He felt, sometimes, too, that she thought about a good many things of which she did not tell him, though when he questioned her, asking, for example, so direct a demand as, "What are you thinking about when you look like that?" she answered only vaguely. Once she had almost lost her temper.

"I do wish," she had said with some of her old girlish vigor, "that you would not ask me what I am thinking. My thoughts are ungovernable and always were. I let them lead me by the nose and I'd be ashamed sometimes to tell where I am."

"You needn't be ashamed before me," he had reminded her.

"Oh, I wouldn't be exactly ashamed," she had said carelessly. "It's just that it would be too bothersome to explain how I got to thinking whatever I'm thinking."

"Do you remember," he had reminded her, "how, when we were about to be engaged, you demanded complete and perfect truth between us?"

This she had answered inconsequentially, he thought. She had said, "I knew nothing whatever then about being married. If I had always told you the truth, you'd have divorced me by now."

"Never!" he exclaimed, much alarmed.

"Besides," she had gone on, "what I didn't know is that when two people live together long and closely they tell each other less and less in words. They know everything anyway—everything, that is, except what they don't want to know."

"Has there been something about me that you haven't wanted to know?" he had asked after some thought.

"Nothing important," she had said in the same half-careless

fashion. "When you've fretted—and you do fret, Ned, though I wish you wouldn't—it doesn't always seem worth while to bother about what little thing is fretting you."

He had been a good deal hurt when she said this and had retired into silence. Then after reflecting upon it he had been compelled to acknowledge that she was right. Had she been torn by every worry that had tortured him, she would have lost her calm, that blessed atmosphere in which he found such strength and refuge. All the same, it had been his fretting, as she called it, that had made his business a success when other publishers were failing. Not even Harrow could have saved him had he been incautious.

Now on this perfect day in May all struggles were in the past. He had got rid of the jungle, by will power and by reading philosophy again. In his day at Harvard William James had been a professor of philosophy and remembering that vivid life-loving figure, he had returned to books he had not read since he left the presence of his teacher. He had been too shy to tell James what he felt about him in those college years, and had passed through his classes merely a name on a roll call.

Reading and rereading these books, Edward in his approaching old age felt a new vigor of the soul return to him. William James had been an American, he told himself, a philosopher, a thinking active man, who gloried in the pragmatism that was a part of America's very soul. He read aloud sometimes to Margaret in the evening the striding powerful words, the abhorrence of violence and war which today, in spite of the mildness of the May sunshine, overshadowed the sky of every intelligent mind.

What had happened to make Americans now think the cruelties of violence signified strength? Strength was to be found only in "the moral equivalent of war," a powerful wisdom, a discipline stronger than any military force could develop, because it was discipline of the self by the self.

He dared not voice such thoughts. Chedbury would never have

understood them and he would have been smeared with red. Yet did the young men never think such thoughts, as they marched on alien roads in half the countries of the world?

He remembered a night, soon after Pearl Harbor, when Mark was a boy of thirteen. He had gone upstairs to Mark's room to tell him good night—a discarded habit, for the growing boy did not like to be babied. But he had not been able to restrain his fears. Surely the war would be over before Mark grew up. He had bent over his son and had kissed his windburned cheek. Mark had been skating all day on the first thick ice of the season.

"You've had a good day," Edward had said. "I can tell it from your face."

"I've had a swell day," Mark had replied. He had gazed into his father's face for a long moment, his eyes dark with what he could not know. Then, inexplicably, he had spoken those words that were graven upon Edward's heart.

"I hope I can live," Mark had said.

Edward had restrained the first impulse of his life to weep wildly. "Of course you will live," he had said. Then unable to bear the pain in his throat he had gone into the hall and shut the door and let the silent tears flow down his cheeks. He had not been able to repeat the scene to Margaret, for shame lest he weep again, and it remained locked within him.

Neither of his sons had been interested in philosophy. Tommy had majored harmlessly in English literature and Mark had cared for nothing but science, and especially physics. Sandy had actually gone in for medicine. He did not approve women doctors but he felt it only decent not to say so while his younger daughter plowed her difficult way through to successful practice. She had put up her shingle now in Boston, and every quarter he paid such bills as she had not been able to manage and prayed that she would marry some decent man and give up the struggle. Sandy, the grimmest and the gayest of his children, was not likely to give up. She was handsome rather than pretty, her Grandfather Has-

latt having left her his somewhat too long nose, but she was the favorite of her Grandmother Seaton and likely, Margaret had said one day, to come into something substantial when old Mrs. Seaton died.

"That is nothing to me," he had said stiffly.

"It's something to me, you old poker back," Margaret had retorted laughing at him. "Sandy will never get married to that nice boy who is in love with her unless she can pay her share of the expenses."

"You aren't wishing for your mother's death, I hope," he had replied.

"Of course not," Margaret had said in her most cheerful voice. "At the same time, Mother cannot live forever, and I am glad she likes Sandy and I hope she persuades Aunt Dorothea, who seems perennial, to give what she has to Sandy, too. Mary doesn't need it, and the boys can manage."

"Who's this fellow in love with Sandy?" he had then demanded.

"Don't you remember the young man she brought down last Christmas Eve?"

"Not particularly," he had been compelled to say, scraping his memory.

"The big one who broke the footstool when he sat on it?"

"That fellow! I remember thinking I wouldn't like him messing around inside me—a surgeon, wasn't he?"

"He is," Margaret said. "He has curiously delicate hands. In debt up to his neck, too, for his education—it'll be years before they can make ends meet."

This had troubled him a good deal, and he had pondered ways of making marriage possible for this daughter upon whom he had never until now spent much thought. Sandy had been so healthy, so normal, whatever that meant, that she had grown up almost without his noticing her, except to see, with an irritation which made him ashamed, that she got better grades at school

than either of her brothers. Ought not parents to make it possible, he asked himself, for young people to marry at the reasonable hour of the highest biological urge? He and Margaret had been young, and the costs of living then were low. Now it was practically impossible, unless one were a war veteran, to synchronize marriage and biological needs. He had a horror of the easy sexual intercourse that seemed acceptable today even among his friends, and though he could see nothing he could do about it, he did not like the numbers of illegitimate children being born. Such polygamous children were the problems of a monogamous society. Surely there had been far fewer in his youth. Tom's daughter Viola, he feared, was not the premature infant she had been tactfully declared. Very robust, for prematurity! But nothing had been said in Chedbury, of course—not openly. Nobody had dared to say anything to him, naturally.

He preferred not to think it possible that Sandy might be sleeping with her young man, fortified by the astounding amount of protective information that she might have. Agitated, however, by this possibility, he had been casting about in his mind how he could offer her an income without offending her pride, when Mrs. Seaton died suddenly a year ago this May. He refused to think it opportune but the truth was there. He and Margaret had gone over to Paris and had brought the narrow and ancient body back with them in a metal casket. Margaret had not wept. Prepared for her tears he had been nevertheless relieved when they did not flow.

"You aren't hiding your feelings from me?" he had inquired anxiously.

Her hand on his cheek had comforted him. "No, darling. It was time."

This was all she had said. They had left an even more desiccated old woman behind them in the overdecorated French apartment, a frame so ancient, a visage so withered that it was impossible to believe that for her sake a young and ardent man

had once fled both fame and fortune to live with her in happy sin for nearly twoscore years.

"Good-by, children," Aunt Dorothea had said, presenting both her leathery cheeks. To her they were children, though with gray-hair and grandchildren of their own.

"It is frightening to live so long," Margaret had said.

Sitting beside her as they drove into the wide gate of their comfortable home, he had wondered rather soberly if what she had said was true. It did not seem possible, this May morning, that anything could be worse than death.

The pleasant weather held through the week with increasing and unseasonable heat. In the garden after breakfast on Sunday morning Margaret exclaimed over flowers forcing themselves to premature blooming. The roses, she told Edward, were pushing out buds that could not come to maturity.

"I wonder if that wretched atom bomb has set up some sort of heat inside the earth," she mused.

He had been tempted by the ardent sunshine to leave his pile of manuscripts, his constant week-end task, and come out into the garden just as he was, bareheaded and without putting on his topcoat. He saw her, bareheaded too, busy with a trowel, her sleeves rolled high on her still shapely arms. Sunday was her day of gardening, the aged, vociferous, and agitating Italian, Tony Antonelli, who considered the garden his possession, being that day safely at home in South Chedbury. On Mondays Margaret did not go near the garden, allowing Tony time to get over his wrath at what she had done. By Tuesday they were able to quarrel again without rancor.

"I suppose Mark could tell you," Edward now said in answer to her question. They had discussed the atom bomb through many mealtimes together. She was positive of its entire evil, and railed at him when he could not utterly agree. It was, he said, only one evil thing in an evil business. How devastating it really was he

could not find out and he had made up his mind that when Mark came back he would go into the science of this most devilish of weapons. What troubled him most was not the bomb itself so much as the lack of moral principle in the scientists who had allowed themselves to make it. Surely scientists, he had told himself, ought to be the new leaders of morality, all else having failed. When Joseph Barclay had preached a violent sermon against the use of the atomic bomb, a sermon during which Margaret had sat tense, her hands clasped tightly together, Edward had wondered at such resentment. Was not the bomb merely the logical means of an inhuman process?

This he dared not say to Margaret. Instead he remarked now with a mildness to suit the day, "I suppose we should be getting ready for church—unless the sunshine can tempt you to stay home."

"I don't want to go to church," she said, "and yet somehow these days I feel we must."

"Why?" he asked with his undying curiosity concerning all she felt and thought.

"Because we are so helpless," she answered.

He did not ask, helpless against what? He knew that in spite of all he could do she was somehow, underneath her tranquillity, allowing her personal content, even her happiness, to become involved in the incomprehensible events taking place in the world. Both of them had been vaguely cheered at the stolid way in which their own people had taken hold of the political elections six months ago. Voting Republican from long habit, he had been amazed to find that Margaret had voted against him. She had not at first wanted to vote at all, maintaining that she despised equally all the presidential candidates. She would not, she declared, even go to the polls. She would stay home and crochet a doily in her new luncheon set.

This he flouted as a gesture. She crocheted beautifully as she did all things well, and there were times when he liked to see the

ivory needle in her long narrow hands flashing in and out of the daffodil yellow thread. But he had learned that when she picked up such handiwork it was in the nature of a retreat from life.

"You must go," he had exclaimed. "If you do not the whole of Chedbury will know, and after your preachments, my dear, in recent years, concerning the responsibilities of women, it would not do. You may cast a blank ballot, if you like, but you must go into the booth."

Her stupefaction the next morning had aroused his immediate question.

"I thought I was making a strong protest vote," she told him, more confounded than he had ever seen her. "Instead I'm on the winning side."

"What did you do there alone in that booth?" he demanded.

She looked at him with merry eyes. "I voted the straight Democratic ticket—that's what I did—as the strongest protest I could think of against everything I didn't like."

"Do you think you'll like what you got?" he inquired with grimness.

"How do I know what I've got?" she countered. "Maybe if I'd known I was going to get it, I wouldn't have voted for it."

He had snorted at this. "That's democracy for you!"

Afterward in his office he had thought of it again and had laughed silently and alone. All over the country, he supposed, other stupefied people were discovering that they, too, had voted on the winning side. He had written an unusually cheerful letter to Mark, describing his mother's surprise, and remarking that for his own part he was glad to see people get up a little spunk.

Now, in spite of the warmth of the sunshine on this day, he was aware that the momentary optimism over such spunk was dying down. He did not at all like the look of certain signs on the horizon. At his age he did not care to face what he had gone through before in the depression. He wished Mark would come home. He

could talk to Mark. A misery of longing for his son swept over him and for a moment he saw him so vividly that he all but cried out, while Margaret bent over the hyacinth bed.

"The white hyacinths are the most beautiful," she was saying. "I believe I'll cut a few spikes and put them on the church altar."

He did not answer. Lifting his eyes he could imagine he saw Mark's face, the strong lines of jaw and high cheekbones, his eyes, dark and filled with some sort of surprise, gay or not, happy or not, he could not tell. He was leaning out of the cockpit, as he had seen him lean, when he leaped up on wings from the earth.

"What did you say, Ned?" Margaret was asking.

"I said nothing," he replied. He went on with difficulty. "Suddenly I saw Mark."

"You saw him?"

"As if he were here."

He looked at her and saw her wondering, half-frightened face.

"You've been thinking too much about him," she said. "Come, let's go to church."

Vague as he was about his religion, and in spite of basic faith being still assailed by the manifold doubt of his times, he felt comfort today in the morning service. The pew he and Margaret used had belonged to his parents, and he had sat here restlessly as a small boy, and then unwillingly in his youth. Here, too, his children had sat between their parents. Once Mark, at three, always unable to be still, had fallen backward through the seat, and he had reached after him and drawn him up and had hushed his sobs against his shoulder until he slept.

The church was sweet with the scent of early lilacs, and Margaret had set the white hyacinths in a silver bowl between two bunches of the feathery flowers. The place was seldom filled nowadays and it fretted Joseph Barclay that his fiery messages found no response in the cool hearts of today's young. Though he loved

them and yearned for their souls, they did not hear him. Mark had been the arch rebel.

"I can't and won't go to any more of old Joe's rantings," he had said.

"I see the man behind the words," Edward had replied.

"I can't see the man for the words," Mark had retorted too smartly.

"Shame," his mother had put in. "Think of all the minister used to do for you children—the tree at Christmastime, the parties, the baseball in spring in the square, coaching you at football, getting the money together for the swimming pool."

"All granted," Mark had replied instantly. "But preaching still turns my stomach, Mother."

They had not pressed him and when the minister had asked diffidently why Mark no longer came to church with them, Edward had told the truth. "They can't listen to sermons, nowadays, I'm afraid."

Of Mark's soul, Edward felt, he knew nothing at all. He had come near to a glimpse of it one night a week before Mark's enlistment when, his mother having gone to bed, he and the boy had sat together in the library, he marking a manuscript for the printer the next day, and Mark sunk in the biggest chair, and lost in a book of nuclear physics. He had shut it suddenly with so loud a bang that Edward had started and dropped his spectacles.

"Sorry, Dad," Mark had said.

"You are feeling vigorous," Edward had replied.

"No, only somehow for the first time glad I'm going across instead of staying home."

He had looked at his son and it seemed to him that the boy looked careworn, as though he had been sleepless.

"Can you tell me why?" he asked, delicate always before apparent probing.

Mark had answered after a moment with strange gravity. "It postpones what I really want to do."

"Well?"

"If I stayed at home I'd go straight on with my research work in atomic energy. It's what I want to know about, more than anything else. I've got to know. The whole future of man depends upon our knowing."

"Well?"

Mark had hesitated again. He was rubbing his dark hair slowly with both hands into something more than its usual disorder. "I know a fellow older than me—just got married. He's finished college—took exactly the course I want. He has to have a job, of course. Well, the only job he can get is in one of the new war plants. That's a fix, isn't it? You spend four years of your life learning something and then you've got to use what you know to kill people."

He had often wondered what Mark felt about war. They had never discussed it. That night he perceived that this duty was loathsome, and he longed to spare him, and did not know how. There was no escape for the young nowadays.

"It can't last," he had said, and had heard the words feeble in his own ears.

Mark had got to his feet and yawned. "It doesn't do to think. One day at a time, I guess. And maybe no tomorrow."

"Don't say that, son," Edward had remonstrated. "It sounds cynical."

"Sorry, Dad—only why are you older ones so afraid of sounding cynical?"

He had paused upon Mark's question.

"I suppose we were brought up to believe in the goodness of God," he had said at last.

Mark, kicking the coals into the fireplace, had not answered.

"I fear we have somehow failed you," Edward had continued. "I would like you to believe in the goodness of God and the value of life, but I don't know how to teach you. Things were simpler when I was young."

"Oh, I believe in the value of life, all right," Mark had replied. He had folded his arms on the big oaken mantel and leaning his head upon his arms he gazed down into the dying coals. "Life is wonderful—could be, that is."

"If what?" Edward asked, daring another step.

"If it could last," Mark said.

He shook himself like a big dog, stretched his arms their enormous length and yawned again. "Why am I getting serious at this time of night? Must be talking in my sleep! Good night, Dad."

"Good night, my dear son," he had replied.

Left alone he had sat puzzling for a while over the meaning of what Mark had said. Did he mean more or less than the words contained? Who knew? So different was this world from that in which he himself had grown up that the heart even of his son was strange to him. Mark was set upon a solitary path and in spite of all the yearning of his elders, he had to tread the way alone.

The minister was proclaiming the closing hymn. What the sermon had been about Edward did not know. He had not heard a word of it. But the familiar words of the hymn fell on his ears and resounded with memory. "Lead, Kindly Light, amid th' encircling gloom." It had been his father's favorite hymn. He stood up, holding one side of the hymnbook with Margaret. He never sang, having no ear for music, but he liked to hear her clear voice singing. She had sung to their babies in the nursery, though when Mark had been born he had been compelled to remind her, so that Mark would not miss the memory of falling to sleep wrapped in the music of his mother's voice. She had been half ashamed and half laughing. "You see how much too old I am to have this baby," she had told him, pretending to pout. But she had been lovely to his eyes all over again, because he had forgotten how she looked, holding a baby in her arms, rocking and singing. Queer how they used to say a mother shouldn't rock a child! Margaret had rocked theirs because she liked to, flouting

the books and doctors, and yet the other day from a manuscript that came into his office from some psychologist, he learned that after all it was the right thing to rock little babies and sing to them, to pick them up when they cried. He was glad he had always picked up Mark when he cried, and glad for the nights he had sat with him through thunderstorms until he was a big boy.

The benediction was over and he and Margaret went out of the church, greeting their friends as usual. Fioretta was a Catholic and she took Tom and the children with her to mass, early mass this morning probably, dragging them out of their sleep so that she would have plenty of time in the kitchen to prepare the huge meal that he shrank from even in contemplation. His digestion was healthy but delicate.

The sun was hotter than ever when they came out to the sloping lawn. On the horizon over Chedbury below them evil-looking clouds were looming. There would be a thunderstorm later in the afternoon, and then the night would be cool.

He paused, looking down over the green, and then feeling strangely weary he sat down for a moment on the mass of rock outside the church door. The rock had been the subject of argument and controversy in town meeting more than once. Some of the citizens of Chedbury wanted it dynamited and carried away, but he and others had opposed this stoutly. Gray and lichen covered, the huge mass had been here in the time of Chedbury's first settlers. He preferred it to grass. There was something symbolic about rock in New England. It lent character even to the church.

At the end of the war he had been inspired by an idea. He still felt it was an inspiration. Instead of the pretentious shaft of marble upon the green as a memorial to the twelve Chedbury boys who had been killed in Europe and in Asia, he had suggested a heavy bronze plate sunk into this rock. Chedbury folk had doubted so unconventional an idea, but the minister had pushed it through.

"A wonderful conception," he had declared in town meeting. "There's something eternal about rock."

The grocer had finally cast the deciding vote, won by the fact that a bronze plate cost next to nothing. Edward turned his head to read again the twelve names. John Carosi's son headed the list, "John Brown Carosi, aged nineteen." He remembered Jack as a lively small boy, squeezing his way between the presses to find his father and beg for a nickel.

"Aren't you well?" Margaret asked.

"Quite well," he replied, lying a little. He got up and they walked slowly down the sidewalk that bordered the green, circling it to the white house at the foot.

The sun poured sultry into the yard, but the old trees cast a heavy shade and they walked in silence toward the door. A croquet game was going on in the back yard and they heard the children screaming over the wickets.

"I believe the bees are out," Margaret said.

"They are thought to be fretful when a thunderstorm is coming," he replied.

So heavy was his sense of doom as he mounted the steps slowly that he wondered if he, like old Tom Seaton, was to die by a stroke. The front door was open and the house was strangely quiet. Where was Fioretta and where was Tom?

He stood for a moment looking into the shadows of the wide hall. Then he saw Tom and knew that doom had fallen. Tom stood at the wall telephone, the receiver in his hand, his face white and stiff. He hung the receiver upon the hook, and came toward them slowly.

"That was for you, Ed. A telegram. Brace yourself. It's about Mark."

They stared at him, two aging parents.

"He crashed," Tom said, "coming in from Berlin."

His first feeling, stupid with grief, was one of envy. He wished that he could wail aloud as Fioretta was wailing. She stood in the kitchen door, holding her big white apron to her face, sobbing. It

would help him if Margaret could weep aloud. But she, too, could not weep.

She sat down on the carved chest beside the stair. He leaned against the wall. Tom repeated the bare words of official regret, as he could remember them.

"Hank wanted to type it out but there was nobody to send, since it's Sunday. He'll drop it in the mail."

"I'll go around and get it," Edward said quietly. He felt suddenly strong and alert.

"I'll fetch my car," Tom said.

"Let me come," Margaret begged. She turned to Fioretta. "My dear, give the children their dinner. Don't let it be spoiled for them."

"I can't eat a bite," Fioretta sobbed.

But she would eat, he knew. She would eat and cry at the same time. He never wanted to eat again. His stomach felt shriveled and dry. But he held himself straight as usual and Margaret slipped her hand into his elbow while Tom whirled the car out of the garage.

They drove in silence through the humid sunshine toward the small railroad station where Hank Parker, the station master, received telegrams. The station was empty. Hank stood behind the window in his shirt sleeves, his eyes shaded by a piece of green paper held under his cap. He looked at them sorrowfully from behind the thin iron bars.

"I'd ha' given a million not to have got this," he said simply. He pushed the yellow slip of paper between the bars and Edward took it. He held it for Margaret to read with him and Tom waited, his face red and grave.

There was nothing told in the bare words except the monstrous fact. How it had come about he must wait to know. Mark, who had never had an accident, his genius son, was dead. He had an unutterable longing to get home, into his own house.

"Thank you, Hank," he managed to say. "We'll have to learn how to get along somehow, now."



"Folks have had to," Hank said. He scratched his ear with his pencil.

"Yes," Margaret said. "Plenty of folk have had to."

"Let's go home," Edward muttered.

"Please, Tom," Margaret said.

They climbed into the car again and Tom took them to their own gate. "I wish to God there was something I could do," he urged.

"There's nothing, of course," Edward said.

"You might tell a few people," Margaret said. "You'll know the right ones. Ask them not to call us up for a bit."

"I will," he promised.

They watched him drive away and then they walked wearily along the brick path between the two rows of flaming scarlet tulips. They mounted the steps and opened the door and shut it again. The house was empty. Even the servants were gone on a Sunday afternoon. He had never imagined such terrifying stillness. He turned to Margaret and caught her in his arms and together they began to weep.

It was Lewis Harrow, strangely, who gave him his first comfort. The amazing ineptitude of people who sought to assuage his sorrow made him ashamed for their sakes and he found himself coming to their aid with his utmost efforts. "Yes," he said, "I know—God's will is inscrutable. . . . Yes, it is good that we have our other children—and of course our grandchildren. . . . Of course," he agreed, "life is difficult today for the young. Perhaps Mark is spared a great deal."

He allowed Joseph Barclay to pray with him, first alone and then with Margaret. Margaret bowed her head, her face white and still, her hands clasped on her knees.

She had the wisdom not to try to comfort him, and he did not try to comfort her. For them there was no comfort—not yet. Together they reached the ultimate in pain, and dimly he began to

perceive that of all the divisions among people, the deepest and the most universal is that abyss which lies between those who have suffered the ultimate in pain and those who have not. Those who had suffered spoke few words, but the clasp of their hands upon his was strong and warm.

He held his daughter Mary in his arms and let her sob, knowing that she, too, understood nothing yet of sorrow. "Don't cry, my dear," he said almost pleasantly. "You have a responsibility toward life, you know. You mustn't forget that."

The hardest comfort of all was from those who tried to find meaning in Mark's death. He loved Joseph Barclay because he was not one of these. When he prayed, the minister had said, "I could tell you this is God's will but I don't believe it is. I could point out to you that Mark died while he was taking food to those who had been his enemies, but we know they weren't his enemies and never had been, his or ours. He was taking food to the Germans so that they wouldn't turn Communist. Maybe that will prove worth dying for, but I can't promise you that it will."

"Joe, you are a man of God, and now I know it," Edward had replied.

It was Harrow who came flying back across the Atlantic bringing comfort. Upon receiving Mary's cable he had flown straight to Germany, slashing his way through red tape, more arrogant than any officer, inquiring of them all if they knew who he was.

"By God, I'm the most famous writer in the United States," he shouted, furrowing his thick black brows. "What I can write about you and where I can publish it would surprise you!" By such totalitarian methods he had forced his way to the scene of Mark's death.

Once home again, he rushed from the landing field to Chedbury and went straight to the house, where he found Edward and Margaret walking in the garden after the food they had tried to eat at midday.

"I've come as soon as I could," he announced. "I knew you'd

want to know exactly what happened. I went to find out and I think I got it all."

"Come inside, Lew," Edward said.

"Dear Lewis," Margaret said and took his hand. "How did you know what we wanted?"

"My damned intuition, I suppose," he retorted. They were in the empty living room. Margaret had made it as pretty as usual with her flowers. Baynes and Sandra had come, of course, and most of Chedbury had streamed quietly through the door. That was over now. Edward had not allowed even Tommy and Sandy to stay. He wanted to be alone with Margaret. They were face to face with the days, one after another.

Harrow sat down. He flung off his topcoat as though it stifled him. The weather had turned cool again, after the frightful thunderstorm on the Sunday they had first heard Mark was dead.

Harrow leaned forward, his big ugly mouth working, his dark hair straight on his forehead.

"I wish to God I could tell you something wonderful," he said. "I wish Mark had died saving somebody or something. But there isn't anything wonderful. He was simply part of the machine. The planes leave every few minutes from the American zone and fly over the border into the Russian zone. It's not easy because of the hours and the Russians' potshots, and sometimes the weather. It's round-the-clock stuff. The planes keep in line—every few minutes. If they can't land at the receiving end for some reason or other they just fly back to where they started from and get in line again and start over. That's what Mark did. Something must have been wrong with his plane and he didn't dare to land and so he just went back to the starting place and tried to come down there. A ground man said he saw one of the wheels roll away, and then Mark crashed nose down into the earth and his plane began to burn."

"Was—his body—destroyed?" He put the question which he saw in Margaret's eyes.

"No—injured, of course. But it's in a coffin. I arranged for that. It'll be over—in due course. You know 'in due course'? Hah!" Lewis snorted and looked away out of the window. He said roughly, "If you have the sense I hope you have, you won't open the coffin. Just have a nice funeral."

He sighed enormously and got to his feet. "I wish I knew how to say things to you, but I don't. There's no sense to anything, I guess."

He lumbered toward the door and Margaret stopped him.

"Lew, my dear."

He turned.

Her face, wet with tears, was shining and tender. "Has Mary told you?"

"Told me what?" he demanded. "I only had the cable about Mark. I've been rushing around too much for letters."

"Then let me tell you," Margaret said. "Mary won't mind—for my comfort. She's going to have a baby. Lew, you're going to have another little child."

He stared at her for a moment and then rushed to her and fell upon his knees before her. "I worship you," he muttered. "Ed, I worship this wife of yours!"

"So do I," Edward said. "So do I."

They sat quietly looking at each other when he had gone. They smiled at each other. Once or twice he thought he might try to put into words how for him their love had passed now into something transcendental, something crystal and clear, like light enfolding them both. Life they knew and now death they knew, and nothing could separate them, not time and not eternity.

He felt unutterably weary, yet not spent. Looking into her face, he understood that she, too, felt as he did. They needed something to renew their bodies, that the spirit which dwelled in them both might live.

"Shall I fetch a little of Fioretta's wine?" he asked.

Fioretta, longing to be of use to them, had sent a jug of her homemade wine.

"That would be nice," Margaret said. She leaned back in her chair and folded her hands on her knees. He went to her and knelt before her and kissed her hands. She leaned forward and took his head between her palms and kissed his forehead and then his lips.

"Dear love," she said, "bring a little bread with the wine."

He went away to bring that for which she had asked. He poured the wine into an old amber glass pitcher that had once been his mother's. She had poured milk from it when he was a boy. Now he filled it with the wine. He took a loaf from the breadbox of yellow painted tin and broke it upon a silver tray and putting two wine glasses too on the tray, he carried everything back to the living room. There he poured the wine and gave it to her, and he poured his own and he passed her the bread and they ate and drank.

When they had finished, Margaret took the cups and set them on the tray.

"Now that we know everything," she said, "now that we know there is no use in trying to understand, shall we go out into the garden, Ned?"

"Yes, let us go," he said. "It looks as though the sunset would be splendid."

